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STRANGERS AT THE GATE

TALES OF RUSSIAN JEWRY

STRANGERS AT THE GATE

TALES OF RUSSIAN JEWRY

BY

SAMUEL GORDON

Author of "Sons of the Covenant," "Lesser Destinies," etc.

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DAUGHTERS OF SHEM

A Study in Sisters

I

The shop stood in the very centre of the town. One could determine this with almost mathematical precision, for the place was styled a town less on its merits than by geographical courtesy; as a matter of fact it consisted of a single street, all frontage, which, starting from the shop, took a few strides to the right, as many, or as few, to the left, and then broke off abruptly. It enjoyed, however, the distinction of being one of the half dozen frontier stations within the railway radius, the main object of which is to render the lives of travellers passing in and out of the land of the shadow of the Czar as much a burden to themselves as possible. Woe to the improvident passenger whose passport shows the slightest flaw or discrepancy. The double-headed eagle of Russia has sharp eyes and sharper claws, and he can strike hard, unless one has the means and the presence of mind to soothe the ruffled feelings of his myrmidons. As a rule, palm oil will be found very effective. If you succeed in running the bureaucratic gauntlet, you are allowed to get off with the fright, and the conviction that the Russian frontier is a beautiful thing in the retrospect. If you do not, you become an object of tender solicitude to sundry gendarmes, till advices arrive whether and whither you are to be expedited by special escort.

To begin again, then. The shop stood in the middle of the town. It was a miscellaneous depôt of salt herrings, treacle, Limburg cheese, and everything else that could go to make it a large-sized spice-box. Its atmosphere, in consequence, was a downright extravagance; condensed in jars, it could have been sold as an original kind of condiment. But Zillah was used to it by now. She had been born into it, though she could never make out how, under the circumstances, she had survived her birth.

Just now she was serving in the shop, as usual; that is, she was seated behind the counter absorbed in her book, while Yeiteles, the boy-of-all-work, attended to the customers, and handed her the money, which Zillah never checked. For Zillah did nothing but read —not the homespun lucubrations of the Jargon literature, but real German novels by Franzos, and Marlitt, and Spielhagen. When she was nine, and her sister, Salka, seven, they had been sent to their uncle, a well-to-do shopkeeper in an East Prussian provincial capital, to get a little schooling. Salka did not go back to him after the first holidays, because all the time she had been dying of home-sickness; not even the beautiful name of Rosalie, which her girl-cousins had promised to give her, could prompt her to return. But Zillah went back, term after term, till she was sixteen, because she did not notice the silent protest in her parents' eyes, the unspoken admonition that it was time she should cast anchor at their hearth; and when at last there came tangible cause for her to stay with them, she obeyed, but with a heart gnawed to the core by discontent.

It was her mother's illness that had called Zillah back to the hole-and-corner life in the dreary frontier town, just as her eyes were beginning to open on the manifold glories and the gladness of the outer world, her ears to catch the loudening echoes of its thousand-voiced laughter, her soul to feel its life-joy, which leavened her placid girlhood with a subtle presage of possible delights. Aye, just then she had to leave it all; but she brought the memory of it, a precious contraband, back with her into captivity, three months of which had ripened her into a woman. One grows old quickly in prison. And to her woman's fancy, which intensified the girl's dream, these things seemed more desirable, more alluring, because of the iron restraint that hemmed in her young life. Not fifty yards from the house loomed up the cross-barred frontier-gate, where the sentries' bayonets gleamed night and day, and fierce-eyed, impatient bloodhounds yelped disconsolately. And beyond them lay the fairy-land from which she had been banished, the gladsome companionship of the wider, larger life she so often dwelt on with hungering memory. Every evening, as she heard the rattle of the massive ring-chain being drawn across the gate-posts, she felt the world was locked amid the hard metallic laughter of her malignant fate.

That was her horizon without. And within, the same narrowness, the same choking of the tether. Three human souls, just three, peopled her universe. The bedridden, unrepining mother; the equally patient sister, who had made it her task to fan the flickering life back to a fuller blaze; and the sturdy, quick-witted

father, who was constantly traversing the country's breadth to pile yet higher the contents of the stout oaken safe; and report had it that Anshel Markovitz was a prosperous man. On these three, then, Zillah expended what emotions were not crushed within her by the leaden-footed routine. She gave them all her heart; and yet, when they thought her closest to them, she was roving through an enchanting wonder-world whither they did not accompany her—the world she had fashioned for herself out of the books she was for ever reading—reading—reading.

Five years lay between her final return from Germany and this sultry late-summer afternoon. There was little or no business, and Yeiteles had utilized the fact by going to sleep in an empty herring barrel; the salt smell made his throat very dry, and he wheezed raucously. Zillah sat in a wicker chair, her hands toying idly in her lap with the book they held. She was dreaming—the same old dreams of the far-away, the unattainable. She got tired of that as well. Wearily she rose and stepped to the door; the shop was stifling. The street appeared empty, but no—just then old Torkov, the hunchback idiot, came hobbling round the corner. Just in front of Zillah he stopped, his gaze caught by a putrefying apple on the pavement—the pigs had over-sighted it because they preferred to nose in the garbage of the open road. With a squeal of joy Torkov snatched up his treasure-trove, and devoured it as he shambled on. Zillah looked after him with a curious smile on her face.

"God was good to you, Torkov," she murmured at last, "better than to me. If only I had been born like that, inwardly and outwardly."

Then she went back to her wicker chair and the German novel. Yeiteles, awakened by her step, sat up with a snort, and rubbed his eyes. Another footfall was heard from the back of the shop, and Salka came in softly.

"Mother is asleep," she said. "I'll just run down to the post and see if there is a letter from father. If mother calls——"

Zillah nodded silently. She always saved words where signs sufficed; perhaps it was that which had stamped the pathos on her lips.

Salka was considerably longer over her errand than was usually the case, so much so that she felt it necessary to give an explanation on her return.

"The Police Commissioner is dead—died suddenly," she said; "I stayed to hear all about it. Everybody is wondering what the new man will be like. There is a lot of excitement."

"Yes, a death is the only thing that makes folks here know they are alive," commented Zillah. "Is there a letter?"

"Oh, I nearly forgot," stammered Salka, confused at having apparently neglected their father on account of a stranger; "yes, a big one—I can feel by the envelope. Shall we wait till mother wakes up?"

"No," said Zillah, "if there is good news she will hear it twice—once from our telling and again from the reading. If, God forbid, something is not as it ought to be, we shall know what to leave out."

And slowly she ripped open the cover, while Salka looked at her with shining eyes. It was a very big letter—twice the ordinary length; it began by saying

that the writer was well, and that business was flourishing, and went on to detail with much circumstance the bargains he had driven, as well as the course of his journeys. A puzzled look came over Zillah's face as she read.

"I don't know," she suddenly interrupted herself, "father never writes like that. There's something he has to say and is putting off—ah, here it is!"

She had skimmed the next page hurriedly, and had found what she was searching for. It ran as follows: "And now, my dear ones, I have joyful tidings for you; like a miser his gold, so have I been eking out the pleasure of it to the utmost. I am returning to you this day week, and not alone. I am bringing with me—but I shall not say whom, only that a great honor is being done to our house. You will be pleased with me. So content yourselves meantime with the knowledge that wherever I go, whatever I do, my children's happiness is nearest my heart."

Zillah paused and looked questions at her sister. The latter answered only with a mischievous smile.

"Tell me, what does it mean? You seem to be in the secret," urged Zillah.

"You know, too. If not, I shall give you a hint: you were twenty-one this summer."

"Well?" asked Zillah, keeping down her upstruggling suspicion of the truth.

"And father took your photograph away with him."

Zillah started back, pale to the lips. Then she looked round quickly; the shop was empty. Yeiteles had sneaked out to verify the report of the Commissioner's death.

"It means—my marriage," she whispered.

Salka was about to assent, with a merry laugh at the well-planned surprise; but she stopped short when she saw Zillah's mouth contract as with the pain of a sudden wound.

"Oh, anything but that," came piteously from the puckered lips, "anything but that, Salka. Why should it be? Do I complain? Do I say I am dissatisfied? All I ask is to be left to myself. I don't want to belong to anyone else. I want to be my own—and yours. I am to be given to a man into whose face I have never looked, whose voice I have never heard, to be his inalienably, while I may be gasping for liberty; what shall I do, sister of mine, what shall I do?"

Salka's eyes drooped because they were heavy with the mist of tears. "Trust father," she replied, after a while; "he is not the man to make mistakes. I am certain he has satisfied himself that your husband-to-be is all one can desire. Does he not say he is always thinking of our happiness?"

"Who says I am not happy?" asked Zillah, eagerly. "Am I to go about laughing and singing with the shadow of mother's illness in the house? I shall promise him he will never see a frown on my face, never a vexed look; but he must not force me to this."

"It will grieve him—and mother," said Salka, quietly.

Zillah clenched her hands.

"I have never thought of myself," she said, almost harshly, "it was always of them; well, they must also be generous for once." Then her eyes lit up. "Suppose the man does not care for me, after all?" she broke off suddenly.

Salka came a step nearer, and silently turned her sister's face to the light; then as silently she shook her head.

"You think he will approve of me?" said Zillah, despairingly.

"Who would not?" replied Salka.

There was a slight tapping overhead.

"Mother's awake—that's her knock," continued Salka, hurriedly. "Come, we must read her the letter."

Zillah held her back.

"Not a word—don't tell her how I think of it," she whispered; "another time, when she is stronger."

Salka nodded, and led the way up to the spacious, airy bedroom. A pale, wasted woman smiled on them happily, as they entered.

"Good news from father," cried Salka; "listen—"

But the next moment Zillah had taken the letter out of her hand.

"I am the elder," she said simply. Steady and clear her voice gave out every word, without a quaver, even when she came to the tidings at which her heart had rebelled.

The happy smile deepened in her mother's eyes, and then the thin little voice said:

"Thank God! So he has succeeded. Zillah, kiss me. That was a cold kiss, but perhaps it is my fault; my lips are never warm. In a week's time, then?"

Salka stood at the window.

"Some people have gone into the shop, Zillah," she called.

And Zillah went downstairs, thanking Providence for such a sister.

II

It was the following afternoon. From the doorway of the shop Zillah was staring into infinity. Over night she had had ample time to grasp the situation more clearly and to gaze deeper into her heart; both which things did not tend to make her happier. It was not merely the thought of being handed over, bound hand and foot, to an utter stranger, which agonized her; but with such a marriage she knew full well her last chance of redeeming herself from the trammels of her present bondage was gone irretrievably. For the man who had gained the approval of her parents so signally as this projected husband of hers seemed to have done, could not but stand in complete accord with their views and ways and wishes. And their views and ways were not always hers. Their wishes had always found her obedient; all the rebelling she had done had usually been against herself. But now she was asked to lock the portals of her prison and throw away the key. She was to be burdened with duties that were but a euphemism for menial service. She would be a household drudge, weaving day to day and year to year, without a knot in the texture to mark where an event had broken the faceless uniformity. That was the fate of all the women she knew; only they had harnessed themselves willingly in their traces —nay more, they flaunted them, as a badge of honor, in the eyes of those who had not yet become yokefellows. But these women had not been given understanding; the world's cry rang in their ears inarticulate, they did not even know it was capable of interpretation. She, too, would have to forget that to her

it was once fraught with a great meaning; she would forget easily once she got into the groove of haggling over the price of vegetables and descanting on the merits of the tinker who doctored her pots and pans. It escaped her that this did not define the scope and function of the average housewife of her race, or any race; but when one is sore with oneself, one is least likely to do justice to others.

Her eyes ached with the cloudless glare of the afternoon sky. She was glad of it—the physical pain seemed somewhat to lessen her heart-ache, and it was a pain she could relieve more easily than the other. In front of her stretched a strip of greensward carpeting the opposite side of the road. Presently she rested her eyes upon it. A tall man was walking across the grass, his sabre clanking musically against his spurs. As he passed, he turned his face on Zillah's, casually and carelessly; he evidently did not care what there was to be seen. Then his gaze tightened; it became a stare. Zillah stood unconcerned. She was used to this, had been used to it since she was fifteen. Most people looked at her; some went to the trouble of adjusting their *pince-nez* for a proper focus. From that she knew she was beautiful; the glances of young men make a reliable mirror.

The tall man walked on, but at a slower pace. Two or three times he looked round, but the worship of his eyes was wasted on Zillah, for she was busy resting her own on the grass-patch opposite. And when she found they were relieved, she retired to her wicker chair, and went on with her book. Business was slack, as usual at this time of the day, and she could look

forward to a long stretch of leisure. Her story was getting near to the climax; rapidly, ravenously almost, she was turning the pages, fascinated by the power of its genius—yes, she knew what genius was. Suddenly a cry of vexation broke from her; a shadow had fallen across the leaf, and would not go away. She looked up; the tall young officer of half-an-hour ago stood in the doorway, his attitude one of irresolution. Her upward glance seemed to decide him; he stepped into the shop, touching his cap politely and keeping his sabre from clattering. Zillah remained quietly seated.

"What do you speak here?" he asked. And just then he caught sight of the book Zillah had laid open upon the counter, and continued in excellent German: "Ah, the language of Heine; we shall understand each other."

His voice sounded firm, yet mellow—not an unkindly voice.

"What is your wish?" asked Zillah, self-possessed.

The young man forgot to answer immediately; he was immersed in her eyes. He recovered himself with a little laugh.

"I am bewitched; I suffer from an absurd fancy for smoked flounders. You Jews can prepare them as no other people can; if only you would never do anything worse."

Zillah's face was as that of a statue.

"How many do you require?" she asked, nonchalantly as before.

"Just a couple will do for the present."

"Yeiteles, a pair of flounders for the gentleman; wrap them up neatly," said Zillah.

The next moment she had resumed her book, and was leaning back in her chair, apparently oblivious of everything.

A quiet smile hovered on the officer's lips as he watched Yeiteles clumsily struggling with his task; but from where he stood he could likewise observe Zillah's profile and her long lashes, even to noting how they curled up at the ends. Yeiteles was not so clumsy after all; at any rate he seemed to have taken a marvellously short time over his parcel.

"What have I to pay?" asked the purchaser.

"Twenty copecks, please," answered Zillah, turning over-leaf.

Leisurely the young man pulled out his pocket-book, and from it selected a hundred-rouble note. Zillah took it up, and glanced at it.

"I can't give you change for so much," she said coldly, handing it back to him.

"Then I can't have my flounders, I suppose? I have nothing less," said the other. The smile was there all through.

"No matter; you can send the money round afterwards."

He did not take that for his dismissal; he stood tapping the counter with his knuckles.

"Your book must be very interesting," he said at last.

"Yes," returned Zillah, curtly.

"So interesting that you do not observe this is an historic event—a precedent, to say the least."

Zillah raised her head, but not her eyes.

"You ask how?" he continued. "Well, in this

way. An officer of his Majesty the Emperor comes to make a purchase in a Jewish shop while the mistress is present, and she allows him to get served by the errand-boy, the state of whose fingers is not above reproach. I consider the fact distinctly original."

This time he forced her to look at him.

"When an officer of the Emperor buys something in a Jewish shop," she echoed, "he buys that which he pays for; he does not buy its owner as well."

"In this case she is certainly beyond price," he interrupted banteringly.

"But I am sorry about Yeiteles," she continued eagerly. "Yeiteles, go and wash your hands, and give the gentleman two other flounders."

"Pray don't trouble the excellent Yeiteles," smiled the young man; "I never intended to eat the fish myself; surely you must have known that all along. I came here—can you tell me why I came here?"

"Yes," she replied quickly, "to cast insult at my people."

"Oh, that rankles," he said with a short laugh; "but I did not intend it for an insult, I assure you. It was just an experiment."

Neither by word nor by gesture did she ask his meaning.

"You are certainly not inquisitive," he proceeded; "but I feel sure you would like to know all the same. I wanted to see if the placid, unruffled exterior you presented to me harbored any emotions. You foiled me at first; I am glad I stayed long enough to get a reward for my diplomacy. A volcano beneath an iceberg is a rare phenomenon. I wish you good-day."

At the door he turned again; his former smile had resumed possession of his face.

"Do you know what I should suggest to you for an occupation? You might make a tour in the Greek orthodox villages and exhibit yourself as the Madonna Rediviva. Your eyes alone would bring you many believers."

Five minutes after he was gone Zillah happened to glance at Yeiteles; he looked troubled.

"What is the matter, Yeiteles?" she asked.

"I don't know," stammered the boy; "but if I were you, I should have been more—more friendly to the gentleman. He is the new Police Commissioner."

"And what if he is?" smiled Zillah.

"He might take away your shop license."

"And then?"

"And then I should be without work, and should have to go back home to starve with the others."

III

Zillah sat idle; her book lay discarded. She was reading something more interesting—her own thoughts, to wit; that, after all, was her favorite literature, as it is with all who live their lives in solitude. The form of her thoughts was the same as usual, and yet withal there was a different tone and color to them. She was trying to account to herself for the change, and failed. It seemed to her that the far-away wonder-world to which she had all these years been stretching forth her hands in impotent longing, had quite suddenly stepped close and touched

her on the arm. She had heard its voice speak loudly at her ear, for a moment only, it was true, but the touch still thrilled her, the utterance had not ceased to reverberate. It was a pleasant sensation, this sudden brightness that had flitted across the midnight of her desolation. Only that the mystery of it frightened her. Surely it owed nothing to the young Commissioner who had talked to her yesterday afternoon? What made her suppose it did? Young men had talked to her before, more conciliatingly than this rude stranger had done. It would be paying him a compliment to connect him, however distantly, with anything that gave her pleasure.

And meanwhile her doubts redoubled. Then it struck her it was the close-packed atmosphere of the shop that clogged her power of analysis. Perhaps if she went out into the heart of the forest, among the leafy, nodding wiseacres, they would whisper suggestions to her, and interpret her to herself. She did not wait to hear out her promptings; the next moment she had reached down the crook-handled sunshade of faded pink from its peg—a few rapid touches to her hair, and she was ready.

"Yeiteles," she called from the doorstep, "I shall be back in an hour; be attentive, and don't eat too much treacle."

Quickly she stepped down the street. Outside the last house but one lounged a group of girls and young married women, laughing, chatting, munching pears, and ill-treating innocent pieces of calico with needles and thread. As Zillah approached, their merriment grew hushed. She nodded pleasantly; one or two

responded, but no one asked her where she was going, or if she would join them. Zillah passed on untroubled; she had noted the sudden silence that had greeted her appearance—nay more, she had expected it. Whose was the fault? Not theirs, she admitted that. Her whilom playmates had given her cordial welcome whenever she had appeared in their midst; they had overlooked the chariness of her response as long as they could disguise it to themselves. Then gradually they had become aware that Zillah was the daughter of the richest man in the place, that her beauty was beyond compare, that she possessed knowledge of things far out of their ken; and all this entitled her to her strange aloofness. Pride they called it for short; but to Zillah it sometimes seemed a curse that rested upon her. She could not otherwise account for the perverseness that made her an exile in body, because her soul felt an anchorite. She did not regret it, not even after all these years of loneliness. If a pang stung her heart, it was that she had forced her sister to follow her into this self-banishment. Salka had to choose between her former associates and Zillah; and Salka had chosen as one would expect of her. Loyal little Salka!

The thoughts of it kept Zillah company as far as the forest border. Then she remembered she had come out for a special purpose, and dismissed them. The wood itself had too much tangle and undergrowth to make pleasant walking, but the road-path into which it had been widened was good thoroughfare for foot and vehicle. Zillah kept well within the shadow of the trees. It was quiet as the grave; if she could

not now puzzle her heart clear of its doubts, they would only vanish in the greater darkness of eternity.

Behind her rang out the sound of a horse's hoofs. That did not trouble her; she knew no one who rode a horse, at least at that speed, and therefore she did not fear interruption.

The rider came abreast, cast a quick, sidelong glance at her, and pulled up with a jerk. The next thing she knew was that he had dismounted, and was walking beside her, leading the chafing animal by the bridle.

"Good-day," he said pleasantly; "this is lucky—I can pay my debt now."

She looked at him; their eyes were almost on a level. A flush was on her face, but it might have been only the reflected tint of the pink parasol.

"But you had no value for the money; you did not eat the fish," she said.

"That's true, but my Phylax enjoyed them tremendously. You should have heard his bark after, it sounded like a thanksgiving. By the way, do you often take walks—alone?"

"Whenever occasion offers," she answered equivocally. She was thinking what, according to Yeiteles, would happen if she were not "more friendly to the gentleman." He could take away their shop license. Not that it would make much difference to them—they could live on the contents of the oaken safe; but Yeiteles would be thrown out of employment, and would have to starve. She would sacrifice her feelings of resentment for poor little Yeiteles' sake, and show herself sociable to the Commissioner.

The latter did not appear to feel there was cause for apology.

"Yes, in these nutshell places one has no room to be alone," he said, apropos of nothing; "I have been here twenty-four hours, and already I am gasping for breath. So I came out for a canter."

"The road further on is very good," she could not, despite her resolution, forbear to remark.

"Ah, you don't get rid of me so quickly," he laughed. "The road further on will improve by waiting. I can make its acquaintance later, seeing I may have to stay here some time."

"Unless in the meantime you die from want of breath," she jested.

"It's not so serious as all that," he replied; "I referred only to the moral atmosphere, of course. Otherwise small towns have their advantages. For instance, one cannot waste any money in them—except on flounders."

She ignored his jest. "Not one's money, but one's time," she said gravely. What she really wanted to say was: "One's youth."

"Time, time," he exclaimed with a flippant wave of his hand; "what is time when one is in the twenties? You feel like throwing it away in handfuls. One can start to economize it when one gets old, and the store scanty."

She made no answer. Should she tell him she was jealous of every day, every hour that sped on and left her where she was?

"Why do you look sad? You are not very old," he began again, half playfully, half in earnest.

"Not very, and even if I were, it would make no difference to me," she prevaricated.

"Still you *do* look sad," he persisted, profiting by the opportunity to obtain a good critical look at her; "I noticed it yesterday. Do you know, when I left you, I felt sure you were no stranger to me; I seemed to have known you for years."

"I don't understand," she said.

"I did not understand myself at the time; the explanation came afterwards. It was because I had met so many of your sisters—your national sisters, I mean. I have met them in the capitals of the world—in St. Petersburg, in Berlin, in Paris. They were all beautiful, and they were all sad, despite their diamonds and coronets. You reminded me of them. And why not? Do they not inherit their beauty and sadness from the same stock as you—from the women who sat wailing by the waters of Babylon?"

"I am like them, you say?" she reiterated.

"Yes, except that you surpass them in both things. I wonder how you would look in diamonds."

"It's very kind of you to express curiosity about anything that concerns me," she said lightly; "it's more than I should do myself." Somehow she felt she had let him come within an inch of trespassing on forbidden ground.

They walked on in silence. Zillah's heart throbbed. Again the strange feeling of before had come over her —the vague exultation at having approached near the nameless goal of her desire. It must have arisen from the mention of the beautiful women in coronets. And that was due to the man at her side; he had seen them as close as he saw her now. So it was he, after all, who had brought the wonder-world into her horizon.

But its wonders were no longer shadows; they had become real. They gathered themselves into pomps and pageants that trailed by her in splendor and magnificence; she could almost feel them catching and whirling her off her feet. So she had not come in vain to the forest-oracles; they had given her the knowledge for which she craved. And somehow she did not resent that knowledge being such as it was.

With a little gasp she stopped. "I have walked too far—I must turn back," she said.

"So must I," he echoed quickly.

"No, please;" she lifted her eyes as she spoke—she knew where her eloquence lay. "Take your canter; I should hate to think I deprived you of it."

"As you wish," he said disappointedly. "By the way, though, I haven't settled my account after all."

For a moment she was silent; an answer was struggling to her lips, but to give it utterance would be playing with fire. And yet it was pleasant to play with fire when one felt cold in soul or body. And, therefore, she became reckless.

"I never transact business outside the shop," was what she said.

She was half-way out of sight before he caught the full drift of her words; then a smile spread over his face, and he stood nodding his head till she had disappeared.

Yes, she was right—the road further on was very good riding.

IV

SALKA was watching her sister in the twilight. Her patient was sleeping soundly upstairs, and that was Salka's only opportunity for escaping from the sick-room. When she was not watching her mother, she was watching her sister, and from long observation she had learnt to construe rightly the external indications of her every mood. But the expression Zillah had been wearing all day could not be catalogued under any particular heading. So Salka could only conjecture.

"You seem to be expecting someone," she blurted out at last; "you have been looking like that ever since you came back from your walk yesterday."

"Whom should I expect?" asked Zillah, gazing straight at her. She knew she could do so with safety in the twilight.

"And you have eaten nothing all day," continued Salka, severely. "Do you want to turn the house into a hospital?"

"No, and that's why I don't eat when my appetite plays truant."

"So you admit that?" said Salka, quickly; "then I believe my suspicion is correct."

"What suspicion?" asked Zillah, sitting up suddenly.

"You are, after all, eager to see this intended husband of yours; I can imagine that interfering with your appetite."

Zillah did not reply; she was recovering breath. But Salka mistook her silence.

"Did I not know it?" she went on hastily. "It

merely needed a little time to get yourself reconciled to the idea. Yesterday the look in your eyes was that of apprehension, to-day it is impatience."

"And to-morrow it will be neither, little spy; and you will have no chance of prying and drawing wrong conclusions. Shall I tell you the truth? This intended husband of mine has not cost me a single thought. I have made up my mind on him."

"Without thinking?"

"Without thinking. I intend to wait till the article arrives and put the label on it then."

"Zillah, don't talk like that; remember you might have to spend your life in the company of the article, label and all."

"I might—I might not."

Zillah clasped her hands behind her head, and sat back.

"What are you thinking of, Zillah dear?" asked Salka, uneasily.

"If you promise not to be frightened, I shall tell you."

"Is it so terrible?"

"That depends on the way you look at it. I should like to be right out of it, Salka—right out of it."

"Out of what?" queried Salka, pretending to be calm.

"Out of this crawling, tedious monotony, this fathomless solitude, this death-in-life."

"Zillah!"

"Oh, I know what you mean by that; I know it's black sacrilege to talk in this way of home, of Paradise, as it should be. But one can feel discontented

even in Paradise; Adam and Eve did, and I was not born quite so near Heaven as they were."

"Was that what your look meant?"

"That among other things. I won't tell you what other things. I can hear your teeth chattering loudly enough as it is. I ought not to have answered you at all. But I could not keep it back—this time."

A little sob came from Salka; then she quavered:

"If I know so much, let me know all. Tell me, little sister, what do you want to do?"

"Go out into the world and wear coronets."

"But you can do that here; mother has a beautiful little crown, the one, you know, with the seven stones that glitter red and green and blue. And then there is her golden chain,—thick as my little finger,—which winds twice round the neck, and still reaches down to the waist. She would let you wear them if you asked her."

Gently Zillah stroked the little figure that had come crouching towards her chair.

"You fluttering little stupid," she murmured; "what good would that do? What use is the badge without the office. Diadems mean rule, and power, and homage; but what is there here to rule except one's own rebellious heart, which cries out with the pain whenever it has to be bound with fetters? And then there is the danger of its dying with the restraint, and that would be a bad day for you all. Salka, can you imagine what it is to be near a live thing with a dead heart?"

"I cannot imagine why you should be afflicted with thoughts that are so little in keeping with your life,"

said Salka, wearily. "What has brought it on you? Some trespass you have committed? Then it must have been a grievous one, since your punishment is the hardest that can fall to the lot of a human creature—to battle against its destiny."

"Ah, Salka, but I am not fighting against my destiny: I am fighting for it. If you are not given something you desire, you must try to take it. Is not the mere desire evidence that it was meant to belong to you?"

Salka shook her head.

"I don't know how to argue against you," she said sadly; "I only know you are attempting what is impossible. If there were some hope, I, loving you as I do, would be the readiest to urge you on. And now you can gauge the depth of my love by my protest. Tell me—how is it to be done?"

"Yes, how is it to be done?" repeated Zillah, mechanically.

"You see, I am right," went on Salka, more zealously. "Listen to me, sister. You are a daughter of the race that taught the world what resignation means—the secret of being strong through weakness and proud through humility. Zillah, that secret is part of our heritage; why should you lack it? Look for it in yourself, and you will find it."

"And when I have found it?"

"You will marry the man father has chosen for you; it is he whom you will make your vassal. He will put a queen's crown on your head and worship you."

"And will he expect me to do nothing in return?"

"Nothing—except to make him happy."

"Yes, I suppose he would expect that," said Zillah, reflectively; "he would almost be able to claim it as a right. But the exchange is not fair; his task would be easier than mine."

"How can you tell?" asked Salka, eagerly. "Time will drive your strange fancies out of your head; you will begin to take pride in your household, in your husband's affairs, and when the little ones arrive——"

"I hear voices, but the rest is darkness," said some one from the door.

Salka started up with a little scream, but Zillah kept her seat. Nay, her tone was quiet and commonplace, as she said:

"Make a light, Salka; that rascal of a Yeiteles is late, as usual, on his errands. I suppose he has looked in at his mother's."

While she spoke, Salka had lit the two gas-jets of which the shop boasted. There on the doorstep, smiling and blinking with the sudden glare, stood the Commissioner.

"I am something of an apparition, evidently, but that is the fault of the surroundings," he said genially, showing his white teeth. "I want to settle that debt of mine badly—it has been giving me pangs of conscience. Permit me."

He held the coin out to Zillah, who took it silently.

"I should have called before, but I couldn't," he went on. "A political infidel, for whose society the police felt very anxious, wriggled himself across the frontier, and I had to take a trip into Prussia to escort him back."

Salka stood rigid at the counter, staring large-eyed at the intruder. Zillah saw the stare.

"I forgot to tell you, Salka," she explained hurriedly. "This gentleman gave us the honor of his patronage the other day, and had no change at the time."

The young man had followed her glance.

"Your sister, I suppose?" he said.

Zillah nodded and flushed with embarrassment; was he going to let slip anything about their chance meeting in the forest the day before? She would prefer very much that Salka should hear of it—if she heard at all—from her own lips, and without witnesses. But the Commissioner had not in vain learnt logic at college; from Zillah's reticence about his first appearance, he deduced she had not mentioned the second. In short, she had made a secret of it, and the fact pleased him mightily. And so his next words reassured her.

"What a dreary little place this is," he said, addressing himself to Zillah. "I can find absolutely nobody to talk to, so out of sheer desperation I took a spin on my nag yesterday, thinking my good luck lay outside it. I was right. I got some fine views. I also met one or two interesting people. It was very enjoyable."

"How could it be otherwise—out in the sunshine?" said Zillah. It was quite safe to say that.

"It did not depend on the sunshine," he replied, his eyes fastened on hers. "It was the mood. Just then I felt I could have passed a night in a Carpathian snowdrift and thought I was sleeping on eiderdown. Pity these moods come so rarely, and then only by accident."

Zillah did not avoid his gaze; it did her good—it

made her heart glow. And the covert meaning of his words! She suddenly realized, as he already had done, that there was a secret between her and this man, and the thought did not make her quail; but it kept her silent.

"Does—does the gentleman want to buy anything to-night?" faltered Salka. Her bewilderment was making havoc of her comprehension. This man, this stranger—this Gentile, was conversing with her sister familiarly like an old acquaintance. And her sister betrayed no astonishment, no resentment at the fact.

"That is a pretty broad hint," he said, turning to her good-humoredly, "and it comes just in time. The passenger train from Riga arrives in ten minutes, and I must be at the station to examine the passports. By the way"—he faced Zillah—"you implied you were fond of the sunshine. If you will take the advice of an experienced man, you will find that there is no better way of enjoying it than by taking a walk in some shady place—a forest-road by preference—between the hours of two and three in the afternoon. Good evening, ladies."

He walked out, and left silence behind him.

Salka spoke first. "What does he mean, Zillah?" she asked, her face and voice full of puzzled anxiety.

"How should I know?" replied Zillah, pettishly. "Any one would think from your question that I had a most intimate acquaintance with his way and manner of speaking."

"But you are so much cleverer than I—that's why I asked."

"Well, then, I take it he was simply laughing at us;

he was telling us something every child knows, and then intended us to be impressed by his abstruse wisdom."

"You are right, Zillah; you are always right," said Salka, with a deep breath, as though her mind were disburdened of some great uneasiness. "He was merely laughing at us; he did it before, when he was talking about his moods. Let him—you don't care, Zillah, do you?"

"Not in the least," and Zillah shrugged her shoulders for emphasis; "let him scoff. He thinks we are lawful spoil for ridicule. Has the world not tried to scoff us out of existence these many centuries? Another jeer or two will do us no harm."

Then Salka went upstairs to attend her patient, and Zillah turned the gas low, and pulled her chair to the door, where she sat looking into and listening to the star-lit night. But really she was thinking of the Commissioner and his theory on the sunshine, and wondered since when she had learnt to lie to her sister so lightheartedly.

Yeiteles was late that evening. He had not been to see his mother—he had been playing soldiers with the other boys. His guilty conscience made him expect much scolding and little supper. But Zillah only said:

"Close up the shop, and then there is a piece of cold fowl for you. You will find it in the forest road —I mean in the pantry."

V

THE Commissioner was strolling up and down the alley of trees which formed the vestibule of the forest. This was the third afternoon he did so. The sun was hot overhead, but he did not seem to mind that. Occasionally he walked right to the top of the approach, whence he could peer down the row of houses, and stood watching for five minutes at a stretch. Then he shook his head, and resumed his ambulatory activity. People passed him, made a low reverence, and went on hastily; it was not politic to show curiosity in a Commissioner's movements, especially when he was looking serious and preoccupied. But the birds up in the branches were not afraid of him; they kept on hopping and twittering quite unconcernedly, just to show the human race what a good thing it was to be a bird—sometimes. But it was just as well for them that the Commissioner did not hear enough of them to disturb him, otherwise they might have made acquaintance with the revolver which he kept in his pocket, and which he knew how to handle. He was listening to a voice much more musical than theirs; it was less than a week since he had first heard that voice, and already it seemed to him that by comparison with it all other melodies were jangled discords.

And therefore he had done sentry duty here for three days in succession, in order that he might listen to it again. She had not come—his patient waiting had been in vain. But not all in vain. The long solitary ambushes had done their work effectually—they had been to him a trap and a snare from which he could no longer struggle loose. How they had grip-

ped him and entangled him, these meshes of memory and longing! Several times he had attempted to rend them, and give himself liberty, till he saw the hopelessness of the effort: was he not his own captor as well as prisoner?

And that being so, he started again to wonder why she did not come, until his heart was one agonizing query. He might have gone to the shop to ask her, but that would be humiliating; he would not risk his pride so far—no, were she a hundred times more beautiful. Had she not understood his hint, she who had shown herself adept in letting her meaning peep skilfully from under the mask of words? And then a sudden thought made him bite his lip: had it all been only a trick of practiced coquetry? If it was, what would he do to her—what could he do to her? Harass her and her people with petty indignities and annoyances, such as it was in his power to inflict? He laughed at the notion; if he had been made ridiculous in her eyes, he might at least preserve his self-respect in his own. Better not think of it at all—better think of the great luminous Madonna-eyes, from which truth had looked at him if ever it had faced him out of human countenance. And was he not right? His heart leapt exultantly, for round the bend of the road a pink parasol came floating towards him, shading a tall willowy figure—one would think it not so much a shade as an aureole. Quickly he strode towards her; her hand lay in his—she knew not how.

"We are fated to meet," she said, smiling tremulously.

"Why will you dissemble?" he asked, almost

roughly. "You know this is a fate of our—of my making. Why did you not come yesterday, and before?"

"You forget my time is not my own; there was a great deal of business—who was to attend to it?"

Her lashes were on her cheek; so she could best tell her falsehood. Could she disclose to him why she had not come before? Could she avow the soul-distracting struggle she had lived through in those days? In the sunshine and in the darkness, in her waking hours and in her slumber, she had wrestled with herself as with a deadly enemy. And now it was ended. Should she count it victory or disaster? It seemed almost ungrateful to ask, because, whichever it was, it was fraught with delight ineffable. What mattered it whether it was the gladness of triumph or the sweetness of surrender? And so she had ceased to question, and had gone forth with the spirit of prophecy upon her, for she knew she would find him here.

He seemed to read as much in her face, for he said:

"You had faith in me; I feel honored—I thank you. But it was just as well you did not strain your belief to its utmost. I should have come again tomorrow, and the following day, and perhaps yet once again; but after——"

"After, you would have mounted your horse, and have taken a spin across country. That is all."

"It might be all; I put myself the question a little before you came, and dared not answer it. And now," his eyes flashed, "and now it requires no answering—not, at least, for the present. It's a fool that haggles with the golden present about the future."

"A fool," she echoed; but it was not so much in

corroboration as in misgiving. She could not afford to ignore the future—not for very long; it might turn out to have been bought very dear with the gold of the present.

"Come out of this glare," he said buoyantly; "I can feel the freckle microbes whisking about thick as hail; they make short work of peach-bloom—come."

She followed him unresistingly, with a half smile at his compliment; and as the trees closed round them, closer and yet closer, a sullen anger came into her heart at her own folly for having thrust off from her this happiness for three long days—a prodigal, useless sacrifice. Once or twice she stumbled amid the tangle of the creepers, but she refused the arm he proffered her. No, not touch him—that would be unwise. It would remind her too clearly whence she derived her joy, and that it was iniquitous. Afterwards, perhaps—when she had entirely forgotten to think, and could only feel.

"You have told me nothing of yourself, of your people," he said, as soon as they had come to a little clearing.

"Because there is nothing to tell. My mother has been bedridden for years; my father is a good deal from home; my sister you know."

"A remarkable family history," he laughed; "but no doubt the historian will make up for its brevity by discussing herself in more detail."

"I never talk of myself."

"I see," he bantered, "from an overwhelming sense of modesty; you could say nothing about yourself that would not redound to your credit. Then nothing re-

mains for me but to discover these excellencies for myself. I shall be very searching, I warn you."

"The search will take you a long time."

"The longer the better." He remembered something, and his face clouded. "And yet," he went on slowly, "I may have to break it off suddenly. My stay here is precarious. Any moment—what a fool I am; I speak of having to leave you, and here I go wasting precious time in idle apprehension. Quick, what shall we talk about?"

"Tell me about the beautiful women you have seen," she answered quickly.

"Did I say I had seen beautiful women? It must have been an optical illusion, or at least a grave error of judgment. I apologize to you."

"Don't jest—I am serious."

"Then I hasten to be serious as well," he said, with a lingering glance at her; she felt it, though she did not see it. "I shall tell you about one of them in particular; I forget where I saw her—in some big city. She had come there goodness knows from what God-forgotten solitude. A week after her arrival she was famous. She passed from palace to palace with a retinue of slaves. They had left their studies, their easels, their barracks, their counting-houses to follow her wherever she went, for to look at she was like the morning star. But more than all, her husband loved her as his very life, and earth to her was heaven."

"And what became of her?" whispered Zillah.

"You think there ought to be a climax to all this? But there is not. She just came into my mind because you asked me."

"Was she, too, of the sad-faced ones?"

"Yes, she looked sad, but only with excess of her happiness; she had so much and others so little. Or, perhaps, springing from a race that believes in the evil eye, she was afraid lest her joy should have a downfall if she paraded it, and therefore she feigned the sadness she did not feel."

"Are you sure it was feigned?" asked Zillah, staring before her. "Perhaps she had brought to the palaces only half a heart; the other half she might have left behind in the solitude whence she came."

"At first it might have been real," he replied, after a little thought; "but when one has once survived this cleavage of the heart, it grows again rapidly, until there is not even a scar to show where it had been sundered."

Zillah roused herself—she was getting afraid, sorely afraid; his words seemed to come home to her so very closely, as though they were the answer to her inmost questionings. She must not listen to such answers, not when they came from any one save herself.

"Why do we talk so solemnly?" she said with a little laugh. "Doesn't it feel like desecrating all this gladness and glory around us?"

"You distract me," he exclaimed in mock despair. "Just before you complained of my jesting, and now you are displeased at my seriousness. I shall be silent altogether."

But Zillah felt that the silence would be more perilous than talk of any kind. And so she got him into swing again on indifferent topics. But even with such the time can slip away very quickly, and when they had

made their way back to the avenue of trees, Zillah realized with a start that the vanguard shadows of the dusk were upon them.

"When are you coming again?" he asked, holding her back almost by force.

"To-morrow, or the day after—I can't tell," she murmured, struggling to get her hand loose.

"Listen. My orderly will come to the shop every morning to make a purchase; you can give him the message. But it must be soon—do you hear?—soon!"

He released her, and kissed his fingers, still warm from the contact with hers. She did not see the gesture, because she was speeding on in front. She was running away from the fleet-footed fear that had tracked her home the last time she left him.

Five minutes after she stood again in the shop.

"Miss Zillah has come," shouted Yeiteles up the staircase.

And before Zillah could ask him to explain the reason of his vociferousness, Salka had hurried down full speed.

"Where have you been?" she queried excitedly. "We have been looking for you everywhere."

"I——" began Zillah.

But Salka did not give her time for another syllable. "Here is a letter from father; he has finished his business more quickly than he expected, and is coming home to-night. You must help me prepare for them."

"Them?" asked Zillah.

"Yes, have you forgotten?"

The truth was, Zillah had forgotten.

VI

THE sick-room upstairs had undergone so complete a transformation that it was probably troubled with doubts as to its identity. It had taken to itself a cheerful and festive look. The cumbrous invalid couch had been pushed into a corner, and concealed from view by thick and many-hued hangings. In the centre stood a stout mahogany table, clothed in gleaming napery; upon it, beginning with a pedestal of porcelain, upreared itself the lamp of massive bronze, with a silver candlestick planted on each side for adjutant.

Salka was in the kitchen seeing to the last batch of her fritters in an agony of trepidation. Zillah's assistance had proved worse than useless, and after upsetting a basket of eggs, and almost producing an irremediable catastrophe in the cheese-cakes by handing the salt when Salka had asked her for sugar, she had been ignominiously informed that her further services could be dispensed with. She had submitted to the disgrace with cordial indifference. She had felt more or less an automaton from the moment she had received the news of what was in store for her that evening. And now she sat in the transfigured sick-room, alone with her mother—the latter solicitously bestowed in the wool-stuffed arm-chair. Zillah kept close to the chimney nook, because that was the spot into which all the shadows had crowded. She was more comfortable among the shadows.

"They are late, are they not?" said the invalid.

It was the third time she had asked the question, and each time Zillah had replied patiently, as she did now:

"No, mother—the train does not arrive till a quarter to nine; it isn't that yet, and, besides, we shall hear the engine whistle as it steams into the station."

"To be sure, to be sure," murmured the sufferer. "I cannot see your face, child, but I know you are pleased."

"Of course I am pleased, little mother; do we not always consider it a sort of festival when father comes home?"

"And this time more than all others. Why don't you say what is itching on the tip of your tongue? But it was the same with me when Anshel came the first time. How I remember it! I was sitting in a corner, just as you are now, only that I was pretending to be busy mending socks. And the youngsters—there were more of them than you are here—the youngsters were huddling at the other end of the room, giggling and whispering mischievously; and Yekel, the eldest and wildest of them—he has been quiet enough these many years under the sward away in the Caucasus—aye, Yekel I remember it was who struck up suddenly: 'Every maid a sweetheart has, I alone have none,' as the old song goes. And then the others burst out laughing, while I sat trembling with fear and vexation, till, to make things worse, I pricked my thumb with the darning-needle and ran from the room, sobbing angrily. You see, my daughter, these things are no secret to me; you need not hide your feelings so jealously."

Zillah writhed as though the chair on which she sat had become a rack. But she held herself in check, and turned lovingly to her mother—this poor unsuspecting mother whom happiness made so garrulous.

"Do you think I would grudge you anything?" she smiled. "If I felt what you think, would I be chary of letting you see it?"

"Ah, then you do not feel it?" came the query, full of sadness and disappointment.

"How can I? Mother, you will not blame me for letting my heart go at its own speed, before I know that I can safely give it the rein. Would you have me whip it?"

"You are different, Zillah, different to what I was. I loved my husband before I saw him, because in loving him I was obeying the commandment that bids us honor our parents. Well, what is to be shall be."

Zillah looked at her with the same smile; she could not divest herself of it, for it had become frozen on her face. And this was only the beginning; from this torment there could be no escape till that further agony, to which the present would be as a garden of roses to a bed of brambles. And over it all was to be the mask of her smile, like a "Welcome" written over the entrance to a charnel-house; and before it her dear ones would stand, singing songs of gladness, and not knowing that they were recalling the dead remnants of her feelings to life only in order to make them writhe afresh.

Desperately her lips struggled to frame an answer, but she was saved the trouble. The invalid suddenly sat up—her ears, tight-strung by the peg of suffering, had caught the screech of the approaching train.

"In ten minutes they will be here," she said rapidly. "Now you shall see, Zillah. Quick, set the chairs straight—the lamp-shade is a little to one side. If

only my limbs were strong enough to carry me as far as the door to give him greeting the moment he enters," she sighed; "but, please God, I shall dance at your wedding, Zillah, as lightly as I did at my own—the Cossack dance, your father and I—and you and Salka will stand by clapping your hands. How I remember ——"

And then she rambled back into the distant past, going over the old well-worn details which always were a fresh delight to her listening children. But now they came on Zillah's dazed senses as the murmuring of far-off waters. If only she could keep like that—hear nothing, feel nothing, know nothing. No; presently she would have to become alive. What, so soon? Could they not give her a little more respite, only a very little? Down below in the street were heard the footfalls of men walking rapidly—aye, two men; now they were halting at the door, and the next moment Salka's joyous cry of "Father!" rang out as in triumph.

Zillah rose, her nerves firm, her gaze steady. Was she a child? Would she let this stranger frighten her from her duty of going to meet her father open-armed? If she showed herself craven even before she was fronting the foe, what would be the issue of the conflict? But her resolution had come too late; before she reached the door it had already opened, and her father stepped in, flushed and eager.

"Now, this is what I call honoring a guest," he cried, the glow on his face deepening with pleasure as he noted the inviting appearance of the chamber; "I accept the compliment, even though I have a sus-

picion it isn't all meant for me. Esther, you are looking twenty years younger, and are getting strong as a lion, Salka tells me."

Then he turned to Zillah.

"You have been taking care of mother?" he whispered, kissing her; "that is right, and for reward I have brought some one to take care of you."

And then Zillah noted with a fugitive glance the figure still and motionless in the doorway.

Anshel looked round.

"Where are you, Enoch?" he exclaimed. "We are coming to a fine state of things when men like you are afraid to show their faces."

And the next thing Zillah knew was that her father had led the stranger to her side, holding him by the hand, and was saying:

"Zillah, this is Enoch Gontaller. When you were yet in your cradle his father's name had already travelled to the four corners of the world. It is a name to be proud of, and the son is worthy of the father; need I say more? Come, Enoch, this is my wife—and now you know us all. You have had a silent welcome, but that is only because it comes so deep from the heart."

Zillah turned pale to the lips. So this was the high honor at which her father had hinted—the alliance with the house of the great Rabbi-Talmudist. Ah, that made everything more difficult! She wanted to go on thinking how much more difficult, but her father's last words, which had sounded almost like a reproach, recalled her.

"You have had a wearisome journey," she said to

the guest, her eyes downcast; "pray be seated, and give us your indulgence for a few minutes. We shall soon have our best ready for you."

He did not seem to hear her; he remained standing, his melancholy eyes, luminous in their blackness, riveted upon her. Anshel shot a quick side-glance at him; it was a good sign, this silence of his—it spoke many things. And so it was with a smile of pleasure that he took up the conversation.

"You did not expect us quite so early, I suppose? You almost did right there. For if we are here now, it is something of a miracle. No, there was no danger," he interrupted himself in answer to his wife's anxious look of inquiry, "but—well, here is the whole thing as it happened. I was coming from Berditcheff, where I had stayed several days, and where Enoch joined me. To save delay, we travelled by the next train that was available, and I had no time to get my passport countersigned by the police. But that did not trouble me, because old Tomalov, the Police Commissioner here, and I—well, it would not be the first time we had settled such a matter by accommodation. And it was not till the train stopped at Bogilno, three stations from here, that I heard he was dead, and that his successor had been appointed. You can imagine I did not bless the tidings. I did what I could. First I counted out a hundred roubles for an emergency; and secondly, I took out the Book of Psalms, and made good use of it till we arrived here. Outside the gendarmerie stood the new Commissioner. I don't know whether you have seen him, Zillah—he is tall, with an iron look on his face. My heart sank;

already I saw myself in the train back on my way to Berditcheff to get my passport signed. I handed it to him, such as it was; he glanced at it, and his brow wrinkled. Suddenly it became smooth again. 'Is your name Markovitz?' he asked. I told him it was. 'Do you keep a cheese and herring store?' he went on. 'I do, your Honor,' I replied in astonishment—how did he know? 'Your passport is quite in order, you may go,' he said pleasantly. Is it not miraculous?" And Anshel expanded his broad chest to recoup himself for the breath he had consumed in the narrative.

"It is, indeed, strange," replied Zillah, to whom the last query had been addressed; "and yet—considering you were repeating psalms all the time . . . ."

Anshel tapped his forehead and looked at Enoch.

"And so a woman has shamed us men in understanding," he said almost solemnly.

Enoch cleared his throat of some imaginary obstacle before he answered; his voice was as dreamy as his eyes. "Perhaps you take that for a still greater miracle," he said; "to me it is only as it should be. When God has made a thing that is perfect in its outward semblance, why should He stop half-way and not complete it inwardly? And because it is not always His will to achieve His work, is that any reason to wonder when He does?"

A short silence followed his words, and then Anshel turned smilingly to his daughter.

"What do you say to that?" he asked.

"That the words are ill-applied," she said with a flush, perhaps of modesty, but possibly of anger. "Our guest puts too high an estimate on me. I am only a

poor thing at best, full of defects and blemishes; if he says I am one of those on whom God has laid the seal of perfection, he utters blasphemy."

Enoch's pale face became still paler, but his eyes took a new splendor to themselves as he saw the flush creep over her. Anshel sat as in a dream. The greatest mystery in his life was how it came that such a creature should call him father; and now he thought it time to give up hope of ever solving it.

"You see, Enoch, one never knows when one is going to receive a stone for one's bread," he laughed.

"And yet there are cases where one must offer the bread, although one knows one is going to get a hailstorm of stones in return," said Enoch, quietly.

"And talking of bread, Zillah, will you see that Salka brings up what there is to eat?" broke in the invalid. The mother's eye had suddenly seen a look of unutterable pain flit over her child's face. Yes, embarrassment was sometimes a physical agony.

Zillah obeyed, and a minute or two after, Salka and Yeiteles, the helpful, brought up the steaming dishes, and the homely clatter of plates frightened the spirit of restraint out of the room. Anshel's homespun joviality and Salka's merry prattle acted as a barricade against its return. If Enoch was a little monosyllabic, and Zillah entirely silent, it was only natural under the circumstances. It was also natural that she should withdraw before the others did, pleading a headache. But had any one seen her throw herself on her bed in a tempest of tears and with disconsolate wringing of hands, he might have found more reasonable cause for comment.

VII

"You ask why a lender who has taken security from the borrower in a piece of tillage, varying in quality, may only claim in repayment of his loan that portion of the land which is the less productive?" Enoch was saying to Anshel on the second evening of his visit, a good while after supper had been disposed of. "The reason is this. Suppose a man of affluent means should desire for its fertility a piece of the field belonging to a neighbor who happens to be in monetary straits. Well, this man might say to himself: 'I shall inveigle my neighbor into taking a loan to be repaid on a certain day, and take his estate for a pledge. And then, by some chicanery or underhand act, I shall make him fail in the payment, so that his lands might become forfeited, and I might take my choice of them.' But then comes this law of our Rabbins, which says he may recoup himself only with the inferior portion of it. And in this way there is a curb laid on the avarice of the ungodly."

Anshel listened to him ecstatically: this scholar, this sage, this oracle, who seemed able to expound all the secrets of heaven and earth, was to be his son-in-law. Salka was also sitting at the table. She was not so much listening to Enoch's words as looking at his face, with its eloquent change of expression and the wonderful glow of his eyes. She marvelled why she was watching it so hard. Zillah was seated near the window, which seemed of late to have a peculiar fascination for her. She was reading the new instalment of Spielhagen which had arrived that morning. She neither listened nor looked. Had she paid any

attention at all, she could not have failed to notice that very often the sound of Enoch's voice travelled to her in a straight line, although he was sitting sideways. Even if she had, she would never have associated the fact with a possible intention of Enoch that all this store of learning was to be laid as a tribute at her feet. But perhaps most women would connect love-making more closely with the rattle of spurs and the clank of sabres than with an exhibition of the most brilliant antics of casuistry.

"And now, Enoch," said Anshel, "only one question more; the evening is late—see, mother has fallen asleep already. But I would just have you explain the strange saying of Rabbi Chaninah in the Treatise Baba Kama; that those who keep our holy precepts when they are enjoined to do so can hope for greater reward than those who keep them when there is no such obligation upon them. It seems to me there is more merit in the latter case."

For a moment or two Enoch wrinkled his forehead in thought, and then smiled as the solution of the problem flashed upon him.

"Is not the first instinct of man's nature that of freedom?" he answered. "Does not every reasoning and unreasoning thing rebel against alien control? And so, when we are under a command that enjoins a certain behest on us, there is, as it were, a yoke and a shackle laid upon the very mainspring of our life, for our will and inclination may perhaps be carrying us to the very opposite. Thus the obeying of the injunction entails a certain amount of self-mastery, which makes it more laudable than when it is the result of a spontaneous desire."

Zillah's ear caught the concluding sentence without knowing from what premises it was the deduction. There seemed to be in it something that bore a special significance; and with that an involuntary resentment came over her. Yes, it might be a grand and laudable thing to make a martyr of oneself, but she had lost the taste for it. She had done enough of self-mastering in her brief life to give herself for once the luxury of abandonment.

The two men and Salka had risen to their feet.

"No doubt you think me an exacting host," jested Anshel; "I make you pay for my hospitality with gems of wisdom. Fortunately you are so well provided with the capital that there is no fear of your having to turn bankrupt."

"You are welcome to it," said Enoch; "it is a pleasure to be prodigal in wealth of this sort, if one can only find a receiver for it. I know it isn't current coin everywhere."

Salka had a tolerable notion of the particular bearing of his complaint. She said nothing, but she made a resolution that it should reach its address.

"Zillah, our guest is about to retire," remarked Anshel.

The remark was necessary, for Enoch had stepped close to her, and she had not lifted her head.

"Good-night," she murmured in confusion. Perhaps it had just struck her that, whatever else she lacked, there was no reason why she should lack in ordinary courtesy.

"Good-night," he said simply: and yet it was as though he had wanted to say something more. But the two words had done that without his knowing it.

"It's a queer thing with these women," said Anshel, lighting Enoch to his attic; "how skilfully they will ignore a thing of which every one knows they are aware. And yet this reserve—does it not give zest and flavor to them?"

"It does, indeed," replied Enoch, but only in a half-hearted sort of way.

Salka was helping to bed her mother, who had awakened from her doze.

"Are you comfortable, little mother?" she asked.

"Quite, thank you."

"And you will not want anything else just now?"

"Nothing—except to sleep. You are very good, child."

"Then Zillah may come down with me to the kitchen and help me put things in order there. Will you, Zillah?"

"Of course—did I ever refuse?"

Silently the two sisters made their way downstairs. Zillah gave a little cry of surprise.

"Why, everything is spick and span! What else is there to do?"

Salka smiled at the success of her ruse, but immediately became grave again.

"We can't talk upstairs, we shall disturb mother."

"Is there anything you have to tell me?"

"So many things that I shall end by saying nothing, for I don't know where to begin. However, what happened to you yesterday?"

A great fear struck into Zillah's heart. Had they been seen—overheard?

"When?" she quavered.

"In the evening."

"I told you I had a headache; I don't think that requires much discussion," said Zillah, with a breath of relief.

"Listen, Zillah," said Salka. "Last night, as I came to our room, I stooped over you to kiss you in your sleep; but on your mouth there was such a strange, cruel look that I refrained. I was afraid you might bite me."

"In my sleep?" laughed Zillah, but mirthlessly.

"How did that look come there? It was so different to the one you brought home in the afternoon. It seemed to me it spoke of some terrible hatred—against us, perhaps, Zillah. It made me cry."

"Then it served you right for being a little goose. Are you sure you have never seen me look like that when I am awake?"

"No, I have always seen you beautiful."

"If I appeared cruel, Salka, have I not cause for it?" broke out Zillah, passionately. "Am I not cruelly dealt with? And though I bear my mask of meekness by day, can I help it that my thoughts are written on my face at night? But you need not be afraid of me, waking or sleeping. When I wake, my heart is full of love for you all; and my dreams will not do harm to any one, save myself. Only you must not begrudge me them."

"You are talking wildly," moaned Salka. "Who is dealing cruelly with you? Up till yesterday you had perhaps some reason for thinking yourself aggrieved, but now——"

"Why only till yesterday?"

"Because till then I was sharing your dread of the stranger with whom you were to couple your life. He might have turned out to be a hunchback, or repulsive in face and manner—his father's fame and greatness were no guarantee against that. But when he is beautiful as an archangel, and——"

"Is he beautiful?" queried Zillah, coldly.

"You may well ask; you have not vouchsafed him a glance since his arrival. And therefore you have not noticed how hungrily his gaze is bent on you, and the untold pain of his eyes, although his voice rings so steady, and his words show such calm of self-possession. All the time you sit poring over that stupid book of yours—as though you wanted to read yourself dead."

"It does not work; I have tried it."

"But it serves another purpose," went on Salka, hotly; "it keeps you from noticing your mother's silent reproach and your father's wonder and embarrassment. And when I look at him—at Enoch, with his patient smile—the tears well into my eyes."

Zillah was silent for a moment, then she said suddenly:

"I suppose our parents wish him for a son-in-law?"

"Suppose?" echoed Salka, looking at her sister as if she doubted her reason.

"Well, then," continued Zillah, calmly, "have they not another daughter?"

Salka changed color three times in as many seconds. "You might have spared me that, Zillah," came from her, quietly. "It sounds almost like a taunt. You know that no man who has seen you and me would hesitate about his choice. And he has made his, I assure you."

Zillah caught her in her arms, and gently forced her face up.

"Do you think I should say such a thing unless I meant it?" she whispered. "Salka, if ever I wished I were horrible as a toad to look upon, I wish it now."

The words had broken from her in the rush of her passion, but the next moment they had rolled back upon her as though they knew they were the false echo of her thoughts. Did she really wish it? Was it not yesterday, as she was treading the forest shadows, that, in her heart, she had given thanks to God for her beauty? Had there been any reason that she should prize it then, and, if so, why had she now spoken of it almost as a curse?

"You see, Salka," she hurried on, "it could be arranged. Suppose father promised for your dowry one or two thousand roubles more——"

With a strangled cry Salka tore herself loose from her embrace; then she laughed bitterly.

"Do you really think two thousand roubles will make me equal to you?"

"You are a thousand, thousand times better than I am; I am not worthy to kiss your feet," came like a torrent from Zillah; "you love your parents, and I feel as though I were their murderess. And, therefore, in your thousand-fold goodness, I want you to do me this service. Use all the wiles of our womanhood; I shall think them out night and day, and teach you them. Do everything to make him love you. You will succeed I am certain. Oh, promise me, Salka, promise me."

Salka shook her head. "It is beyond us both," she

said brokenly. "Father says from the moment he saw your picture he went about like a sleep-walker. And then father will never, never consent that his younger daughter should marry before the elder. He would rather have us both remain under his roof till we were grey-headed. It is you, Zillah, who must make the effort."

Zillah stood looking dazed and vacant till Salka got frightened.

"What will you do?" she whispered, stealing an arm round the other's neck.

"What can I do? I must find out," said Zillah, voicelessly. "If you cannot do me this service I ask you, Salka, you will at least do me another."

"Quick, tell me."

"It is a mere trifle by comparison. Just a little falsehood that will hurt nobody in the world. To-morrow afternoon father will be going to Nirshava, and—and our guest will be thrown on our company. I shall want to leave the house for a little time—an hour or so—and I want you to bear me out in saying that I have urgent necessity for it."

"Why, where are you going?" asked Salka, apprehensively.

"Nowhere in particular," said Zillah, glancing away from her; "I only want to be alone; quite alone to take counsel with myself. The solitude will do me good, as it did yesterday. I must come to a decision about this; did you not say so yourself?"

"Is that all? I wish you would give me a harder task to test my love."

"I gave you one."

"That was not a task, it was a forlorn hope."

"Well then, wait; I shall perhaps take you at your word a little later. In the meantime there is to-morrow. Don't forget."

Salka did not fall asleep for a long time; she lay staring wide-eyed into the darkness. Pictured upon it, as on a sable canvas, stood Enoch's pale face with its lustrous eyes. Why should it come to her here in the gloom? It was a punishment she had laid up for herself: she should not have looked at it so much in the light, and then it would not trouble her now, and keep her from her slumber. And more strangely still, like a refrain to a song of her own singing, rang in her ears Zillah's words: "Make him love you!" Her tongue had flouted the suggestion—but her thoughts? Aye, it was child's play to speak with the lips, but the heart could not be tutored so easily into speaking the words it should; and just now the language of her own sounded contrary and wayward. It was urging her to the task her sister had set her, although she herself had dubbed it impossible. Somehow it did not now seem so impossible. Oh, no; it was not because she wished it otherwise. She did not—at least, she told herself so. And then she thought of Zillah's request, and what it meant to herself: an hour of undisturbed companionship with him—not in vision as now, but in living deed, with sight and sound to convince her it was not a phantasy. The thought took hold of her; she tried to drive it away—it would not go. And then she gathered it to her bosom and strained it close, till she felt it tingle into life, and throb with alternate pulses of fear and gladness.

VIII

"You are punctual," said the Commissioner to Zillah, looking at his watch; "you told my man at three; it's three to the minute."

"I was eager to thank you for your kindness to my father," said Zillah, taking no trouble to conceal the breathlessness which evidenced the swiftness of her walk.

"Why not look on that as a matter of course?" he asked a little disappointedly; "I should have preferred had you come with—with a less definite motive."

"How do you know that without it I should have come at all?"

"Oh, there was no guarantee whatever," he said. So long as she was there, what matter if she fenced and quibbled about it?

"But it *was* kind of you," she iterated; "you saved him considerable inconvenience, simply because——"

"Because?"

"Because you are too broad-minded to see a criminal in every man who has not conformed to the absurd ordinances of official tyranny."

"This is treason—rank treason," he exclaimed, with a make-believe frown; "is that the way to speak of the institutions of our all-wise Government?"

"Then you are not broad-minded?"

"I have had a duty given me, which I must fulfil without questioning," he said seriously.

"Then why did you neglect it in the case of my father?"

He looked at her full; then he said smilingly: "Because he happened to be the father of his daughter."

"If so, why do you refuse the daughter's gratitude?"

"I will accept it if she makes it an incident of her coming, not its main motive."

"I offer it to you; make it what you like," she said.

"That's much better," he said approvingly. "By the way, before we dismiss the subject, who was your father's fellow-traveller? Hardly your brother—there was no resemblance. His passport was invulnerable, which unfortunate fact robbed me of a chance of earning some additional gratitude and credit for tolerance."

Zillah's lips closed very tightly; she was afraid lest the impulse to echo his "before we dismiss the subject" would be too strong for her. Why, this particular department of the subject required a world of words all to itself. She tore a little shoot from the nearest fir-bush, and commenced to strip it of its needles.

"I have no brothers," she replied at last; "I thought you understood that. It's a friend of my father."

"He comes from Berditcheff," remarked the Commissioner, puzzled despite the clear drift of her reply. "What is he here for? On business?"

"Yes, on business," she repeated mechanically, while her tense lips drew themselves asunder into the caricature of a smile. He was quick to notice it.

"Please put on your sad mien," he begged earnestly; "that smile looks like a murdered thought."

"Why should I look sad?" she asked jauntily, recklessly. "It's most amusing, I assure you. That man ——"

She broke off abruptly. The full bearing of what she was about to do came rushing in upon her, and

frightened her into silence. She was going to tell this stranger, this mushroom acquaintance, of the things that concerned her life most closely; she was going to vent her ridicule upon them, or, worse perhaps, exact his sympathy. But, thank God, it was still not too late; she could yet retrieve herself.

The Commissioner watched her lynx-like.

"That man," he prompted impatiently.

She took a step backward, and gazed round her desperately, like a hunted fawn.

"It is nothing of consequence, I assure you," she gasped; "and now please excuse me; I must really go, this very minute."

But the Commissioner knew better. "Will you be good enough to give me the particulars you intended to give me concerning this man?" he said, his voice harsh and strained. Zillah remembered her father had called him stern; he was not stern—he was cruel. And yet how his cruelty became him!

"I repeat to you," she said more collectedly, "that it is nothing—nothing worth speaking about."

"Well, then, I must bring more pressure to bear on you. What is it with this man? I ask in my official capacity."

"Indeed, in that it does not concern you in the least," she said eagerly. "Will you not take my word for it?"

"Then it concerns me only personally," he observed, softening his tone. "That man, you were going to say, is intended for your husband; the project does not please you—you were about to speak of it with bitterness and ill-will. Am I right?"

She stared at him dumb and petrified.

"Believe me," he went on gently, "I have not been tracking the cunning and craftiness of crime all these years without being able to unmask the subterfuges of innocence when I come across them."

"You have no right to tax me with subterfuges."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't insist on it as an assertion—I am merely venturing a suggestion. I leave you the right of rebutting, of denial."

For a moment her pride upreared itself rebelliously. Why should he think she owed him confidences? Why should she stand before him like a culprit confessing to a transgression? But then again she felt this power he was wielding over her was as balm to her soul; this dominion of his was a mould into which her heart fitted and seemed safe against life's jutting edges. She lifted her eyes to his fearlessly, and said:

"I do not deny it—I cannot."

Quickly he came close to her. "I felt sure I had spoken for you," he said softly; "and do you know what remains for me now? To think for you—think for you what you have not the courage to think for yourself; to ask the questions which you would go on asking without ever answering them. Shall I?"

Her nod gave him leave.

"Why have our paths crossed, Madonna? Why have we touched each other's hands—why have we looked into each other's faces? Why have I counted the hours, the minutes, till I should touch and look—why have you sent me a message defining the term and limit of my counting? Look, we are standing here

wrapping ourselves in the solitude of each other's company, and yet feeling as though the world were filled with our fulness. What does it mean? We that are distinct and separate by all the differences which should thrust two human beings asunder, we have found each other with but little searching. Tell me, what does it mean?"

She stood listening with clasped hands and parted lips. As he stopped, she turned to him and breathed:

"Go on thinking for me—go on questioning."

He bent close to her, till their foreheads almost touched.

"No, I have questioned enough; it is time to make answer. It means that we are to clasp each other's hands for all our life, and read each other's faces till we are blind in death. You and I and the future, Madonna. Have I not answered right?"

"Yes, you have thought for me, questioned for me, answered for me," said Zillah, trembling; "you have done it well—only too well. And, therefore, the end must be——"

"Must be what?"

"As though there never had been a beginning."

He almost staggered; then he set his teeth hard.

"I see," he grated out, "this has all been a deep-laid plan, a device of cunning and trickery. You said to yourself: 'I shall weave this Gentile's heart into my toils, and then I shall let him writhe; so shall I avenge the wrongs his brothers have done to my sisters.' Girl, from where did you get the courage for that?"

She looked at him steadily.

"Courage?" she said slowly. "I have none. I am not as Jael—she of the milk-bowl and the iron spike. If I could help my suffering race by any service of mine, I should do it gladly; but never with weapons of treachery. Where would such vengeance lead to?"

"I have wronged you—forgive me," he replied humbly. "My disappointment made me unjust; not my disappointment, my misunderstanding rather. You meant something else than your words said. Speak—I shall be very patient."

He waited a minute—two—but there was no sound from her. He took her hand and stroked it tenderly.

"Madonna, Madonna," he whispered, "do you not love me?"

Again there was no answer, but instead she darted at him a look, half ineffable agony, half passionate entreaty. He had been expecting that look; it served his purpose.

"Now we can speak," he said, his voice quivering with suppressed exultation. "Do you remember the woman of whom I told you—the one who was sad because she was overburdened with happiness? Do you know who that woman was? Yourself—yourself as I pictured you in the years to come. You shall walk in the gilded palaces of which I, your husband—do you hear me?—your husband, shall open for you the portals. Goddess mine, do you grasp all that this means? Ah, you do not know the splendor, the grandeur of it—the intoxicating gladness, the exquisite heart-throbs of secure affluence, the surpassing triumph of bended knee and absolute homage. But you shall taste it all, I promise you. And when you are tired of it, I shall make my love your undying delight. Come with me."

"Whither?" she asked dreamily.

"Whither? Away from here. Is this the place where I could ever redeem my promise?"

"Then I must leave my parents," she said, awaking from her trance.

"Do you expect to gain everything and make no sacrifice whatever?"

"I would make any sacrifice, but not this," broke from her like a wail. "Oh, why did you not let me go before—why have you made me listen to all this? Be merciful—do not tempt me too hard. I cannot leave my parents, and yet—and yet, oh, I want to go with you."

The Commissioner clasped both her hands tightly.

"Yes, you shall come with me. And soon. Hear me. You know I am here only on intermediate service. Within the next few days I expect orders to go far inland to take over control of a large revenue department which I have been promised. By then you must be ready to follow me. You must be prepared any moment. In the morning I shall send you a message by my man, and that same evening we must be gone. That is settled."

"Not quite—not quite," she whispered fearfully; "please do not yet take everything for granted. I know if I were now to say yes, I should be bound to it, not only by my heart, but by my conscience also——"

"Then say yes," he interrupted eagerly.

"But I must give myself breathing-space, more for your sake than for mine," she said, ignoring his words; "I must fortify myself to it by clear thought and reasoning that shall sweep away all hindrances now,

and all reproach, should there be any, hereafter. For I shall then be able to say to myself that it was not your importunity, but my own free will, which made my life such as it shall be. Believe me, it will be better for both of us. And one other thing: till then avoid me. Let me come to my decision unprompted, spontaneously. The sight of you would probably be to me more bewilderment than argument. Will you grant me this?"

He cast at her a quick look of suspicion; and then, as her clear eyes met his, he felt ashamed of it.

He nodded. "I will, but in return I shall ask you for something, too. You have not yet told me what your heart says to mine."

"Has my silence not told it more clearly than any words of mine could?" she queried.

"I want your words as well. Say after me: 'Otto, I love you.'"

She obeyed—even when he said he wanted to hear it twice.

"Do you know what my purpose was?" he went on. "I wished you to say it, because I know the utterance will ring in your ears, and admonish you when your surroundings will call to you too loudly. You will remember it, and you will not falter. Or perhaps you count that undue influence?" he added, with the faintest touch of jesting.

She smiled wearily. "No, because you have put me on my guard against it."

"Yes, that is right," he exclaimed quickly, his face suffused with joy; "guard yourself against it. This will probably be the last time you will partake of the experience."

She looked puzzled.

"Because," he explained, "after that it will be my office to safeguard you, to watch over you, to be your armor and shield. And therefore I ask you now, for this once more, to be your own protection. Drink the sensation to the dregs; you will then be better able to appreciate the contrast."

"My armor and shield," she echoed softly, measuring him from head to foot; "that must feel good—I shall think of it. Good-bye." She held out her hand.

"Is that all?" he asked, taking it in his.

"All till——"

"Till we meet again with no parting before us," he said fervently. "I ought to be satisfied with that."

He had to be, for the next moment she had left him and was making her way swiftly and sure-footed through the tangled undergrowth; but he had caught the look with which she had turned from him—it was better than a caress.

Outside in the clearing Zillah moderated her pace. At this rate she would get home too soon, before her blood could settle down into more temperate motion, before she had gained control of her voice and tongue, and could force them to the requisite restraint of everyday speech. Otherwise her feelings would become as a flood on which her secret would be borne to the understanding of any one who chose to listen.

Not yet; her secret would see light soon enough.

The autumn day was crimsoning out into sunset. The flaming orb overhead had gathered back into itself the myriad shafts it had been brandishing all day, and

seemed melting away with the fury of its fire. The clouds flared up like a furnace, as though to infuse the shrinking sky with a little warmth against the numbing touch of the night.

Zillah looked up. Glory and splendor—but before long, the darkness. These things were riddles, even as her own life.

IX

SOFTLY Zillah entered the shop. Yeiteles was weighing out bags of sugar near the window. It was a task that could well be entrusted to him. Rhadamanthus, Chief Justice of the heathen Sheol, was surely not more critical in his verdicts than Yeiteles in his judgment of the scales. He never gave over-weight; he kept that for his perquisite.

From the kitchen came voices. Ah, of course, it was Salka and the wooer. He had slipped Zillah's memory. Well, one could not remember everything, and she had so much to think of. A few steps brought her into their presence. At her entrance Salka started up, and fixed her with an eager, anxious glance. The dry fir-logs on the kitchen-hearth flared up like torches, and made Zillah's features stand out as in daylight. Yes, thought Salka, she had come to her decision; her face showed serene with certainty; the furrows of self-questioning had disappeared, and round her lips played a smile, like a halo of victory.

A quiver of rebellious pain trembled through Salka's heart. Why had she thrown away her chance when it had been thrust upon her unsought? The intimation which had crept into her brain the night before,

and which that afternoon had ripened into conviction —why had it come so late—too late? Had she known then what she knew now, she would have set herself to win him, whatever might betide thereafter. She had trifled with her good fortune, and this was how it worked its revenge. But she must not show anything; she must be brave, brave and maidenly—the one thing meant the other.

"I am glad she is better," she said calmly, in reply to Zillah's remark anent the condition of an imaginary friend suffering from a fictitious illness; "very glad, indeed. Guess what we shall have for supper."

Zillah shrugged her shoulders.

"Sour cabbage stew and blue potatoes."

Zillah opened her eyes.

"It's Enoch's favorite dish—he just told me so," explained Salka.

"Is it?" queried Zillah, in neutral tone.

But Salka accentuated the question her own way; to her it sounded instinct with solicitous interest. "Ah, she has a right to know his favorite dishes," she thought bitterly.

"My dead mother preferred it to all others," said Enoch, quietly. "She was a good woman, and I think one can honor the memory of a good woman even by the eating of cabbage stew."

Zillah glanced at him strangely; his words rang so full and true. Then her bosom heaved with a sudden, nameless anger; why had chance hurled this taunt in her teeth? It was a grand thing to boast of the love one bore to one's mother. Not everybody could do that; she least of all.

"She must have been good," said Salka, unable to resist her impulse; "she has left testimony of it in——" she stopped short, flushing.

"In her son?" supplemented Enoch, with a deprecatory smile. "Oh, I am no paragon—I am full of faults and blemishes;"—Zillah recognized the words—"for instance, I impose myself on people to whom my presence is irksome. That is only one of the great precepts of humanity as laid down by our Rabbins that I am violating. Again——"

Salka started up suddenly. "Mother is tapping for me," she said, hurrying out. It was strange that neither of the others had caught the signal.

There was silence between the two; Enoch had forgotten the second point of self-accusation, and stared mutely into the fire. Zillah took the initiative; her lips were trembling, but her voice was firm.

"I have deserved your reproach," she began, "I have deserved it—can I say more? And now that you have heard me owning to my wrong, will you do justice to me?"

He signed her to continue.

"Then listen. Why are you here? I have not sent for you. You cannot claim that I have broken faith with you; there has been no promise of mine I have omitted to make good. Is there any blame you can attach to me?"

"No, none," he said wearily, after a little pause. "You cannot help being what you are; I cannot help feeling what I feel. But why trouble over it? There is a remedy: I shall go."

An idea flashed on Zillah. No, he must not go away;

he must stay on to be the prop whereon her parents might lean their shattered, battered lives when the blow came—how it pleased her to torture herself with the thought. He was so good and kind—he had studied the "great precepts of humanity"; he would comfort them, and become their son for charity's sake.

"Go?" she echoed. "Who tells you to do that? Why not rather say you have not yet given yourself a fair trial. Why, once you are gone——"

He started up and looked at her with straining eyes.

"Yes?" he prompted.

"Your hopes go with you, I suppose."

"Hope? Then there is really hope?"

"You must not press me for an answer; who knows?"

The equivocation came easily from her lips. What mattered it—one lie more or less? And this was perhaps the only one that might be registered to her credit in heaven. The fir-logs crackled and sputtered as the tongues of flame licked each new vein of resin; both pretended to be listening to them. Thus they could more plausibly give ear to the rush and whirr of their own thoughts.

"So busy, children, that you don't even hear my elf-like footsteps?" Old Anshel's voice broke in on them cheerily from the door; "I suppose now that I have sounded the alarm I may come in?"

He answered his own invitation by striding into the kitchen; his quick eye observed in both something that looked very much like embarrassment. The observation pleased him greatly; this meant making headway.

"I was half-way on to Tuschk when I met the very man I wanted; he was coming to me on the same errand. So we finished our business in the open road, and here I am again in good time and in still better appetite. Where's Salka?"

"With mother," said Zillah; "but don't be afraid—the supper's cooking. Enoch and I are cooking it, aren't we, Enoch?"

"The bill of fare was certainly my suggestion," answered the latter, with a flush of pleasure at her appeal; "but that is all I can take credit for."

"Thank God," muttered Anshel, "that saucepan has done the business. It preached to her the pleasures of housewifery. A marriage cooked in a saucepan; I should laugh, if only I were sure she has learned the sermon well by heart."

It was the pleasantest evening spent since Enoch's arrival. He caught the inspiration of it, and his parables, sophisms, and dialectic fireworks came out thick as hail. Many a time he drove Anshel into a nasty corner, but Anshel only chuckled with delight, like a three-year-old toddler who has found a grown-up man to play with him. Salka alone went about subdued and out of sorts, with a touch of red about her eyes, which might have been attributable to an overhasty drying of tears.

Zillah had been sitting the whole evening on the edge of her mother's arm-chair, stroking the wan cheeks and fondling the nerveless hands. She kept her place there even after the two men had retired upstairs and Salka retreated to the kitchen.

"Just five minutes all to ourselves, little mother,"

she said; "it is such a long time since we have spoken to one another without a listener."

"Yes, quite two days; I am forgetting the sound of your voice—I mean the voice you keep all for myself."

"Should you not begin to accustom yourself to its absence?" asked Zillah, pensively.

"Then you have settled with Enoch, and all is well—it is true?"

"Tell me, mother," said Zillah, ignoring the question and avoiding the joy-lit look that accompanied it; "tell me: was it for the honor of our house that this match was arranged?"

"What a strange thing to ask, child," was the answer. "For our honor? Of course not—for your happiness."

"Then so long as I had that, so long as you knew all my heart's desires were being gratified, would that satisfy you?"

"Quite; what more are we to expect? Zillah, what do you mean? Why do you frighten me with riddles?"

"Forgive me—I was clumsy," stammered Zillah; "I only meant to assure you that when I shall be away you shall hear of my happiness; I shall write you very, very often——"

"Yes, but what need is there of the assurance? Do not these things go without saying? I make no conditions with you, Zillah; I do not ask you to promise anything. I only want you to be a true daughter of mine. The rest I leave to you. Come, I am very tired; put me to bed."

Silently Zillah did as she was bidden; she could not have uttered a word, although it had been to beg her

life. A sense of foiled, abortive effort gnawed in her mind. She had attempted to feel her way. She had achieved nothing. Ah, yes, something. She had instilled into her mother the vague apprehension which afterwards, when she knew that her fears had not been visionary, would dull the shock by its saving foreknowledge. Zillah wondered that she could calculate these things with such precision, could put upon them their proper value; and from that she learnt that her heart was all out of gear—and perhaps not only her heart, but her reason as well. If not, the two would not have made common cause to blunt the sting of her offence.

Slowly she made her way downstairs into the kitchen. Salka, too, was probably fatigued with the long day's toil.

"I might as well lend her a hand while I can," thought Zillah; "next week, perhaps, she will not mind the labor. It will help her to forget she had a sister."

Salka hardly looked up at her entrance.

"So you have made up your mind," she began, after a moment's silence.

"Yes, I have," replied Zillah, reckless and defiant; "I am going away from here."

"I know Enoch's father wants you to live near him," said Salka.

"Enoch's father? I am not going with Enoch—I am going with the Commissioner," she continued calmly, noting Salka's look of stupefaction, "the man you saw in the shop the other day. He asked me to marry him this afternoon. I told him I would consider, but he knows very well what my answer will be.

And now you can go and kill mother with the news if you like."

The heavy silver ladle in Salka's hand clattered to the ground, and lay there disregarded. Then a short inarticulate cry wrung itself from her lips. Zillah did not heed it; she sat down and carefully, dispassionately smoothed back a tress of hair which had struggled loose.

Salka listened: the words she had just heard were vibrating with a strange after-note. At first it was but an indistinct suggestion, then it shaped itself into recognizable sounds, until it rang out clear and resonant:

"Enoch is free—Enoch is free!"

So he was not lost to her after all? Fate had been kind to her—had not taken offence at her former rebuff. To waste this second chance would be deliberately to push aside the extended hand of God.

"Zillah, do as your heart bids you," she said slowly.

With a bound Zillah was at her side, peering deeply into her eyes.

"Salka, are you really telling me to do that?" she panted. "Are you really in earnest? No, I can see you are not speaking to me in mockery. Ah, the true little sister you are! Do you know, Salka," she went on, almost sobbing, "I had expected you would overwhelm me with your reproaches; I thought you would burst out crying, and make me falter with your appeals and passionate entreaties. And perhaps you would not have needed to go so far; just one little word of remonstrance might have turned me from my purpose—and I love him so. But you say I am doing

right; that is the heaven-sign for which I have been waiting. Oh, Salka, Salka!"

Salka wrenched herself loose from her embraces; she did not deserve them.

"What is the use of your staying here eating your heart out?" she said quickly. "Would it be more pleasant for me to see you do that than to know that elsewhere you are tasting love and life to the full? I should scold myself for a selfish, whining weakling, if, because of the pain of parting with you, I should dissuade you from following your truest impulse."

She paused for a moment; then her eyes brightened and her voice rose.

"But that is not the only reason why I ask you to go, Zillah. A great mission awaits you. You will accomplish much for which you would never find the scope here. Out there, in the midst of our enemies, to whom we are but a name and an execration, among them in secret and in ambush, as it were, you will be able to champion our struggling race. It is not our professed advocates, who make a great noise and shout themselves hoarse in the world's market-places, that shall work our redemption. No; it is the quiet example, the living lesson, the subtle, voiceless persuasion by act and deed, however small, which shall teach our adversaries how they misjudge us. We want many, many such teachers scattered abroad. Think of it, Zillah, you will be one of them, and not the idlest, I know. Did my fate call me, ill-equipped though I am, I should go likewise."

A great sigh rose from Salka's inmost heart as she finished. That sigh was a prayer of gratitude. God

was merciful, and had given her something wherewith to salve her conscience. It was no longer an ignominious falsehood, a despicable device, which made her send her sister adrift; but a great and glorious purpose which had ennobled selfishness into self-sacrifice.

Zillah seemed to think so, too. The color in her face ebbed and flowed, her fingers twined and untwined as she listened.

"Can I ever thank you, Salka?" she said finally; "Whence did you take that inspiration? I might have gone on thinking and thinking—it would never have come to me. Salka, as you love me, let me not hear another word from you to-night. I want to soak my brain in what you have said—to teach our enemies to love us! What a task you have set me. One thing you can be sure of—I shall be loyal to it. I shall sing the songs of the Lord in a strange land as no one has sung them yet. Believe me, my life shall not be lived in vain. Do I not know it? I must wipe many a tear from the face of our nation's misery, I must apply many a bandage to its sufferings, before I can hope to earn atonement for the wounds I am inflicting on those that gave me life."

She stopped and listened; down the street a horseman was passing at a furious gallop.

"That is he," she muttered, her finger to her lip; "hark, how his restlessness is scourging him. Come, Salka, if mother should wake, she will wonder what we are doing. Are you not lucky, Salka? Only a few days more, and you will have no need to share your mother with any one else."

When Yeiteles entered the kitchen next morning,

he had quite a shock. On the floor, rubbing shoulders with the plebeian fire-tongs, lay the silver ladle, disconsolate and neglected.

X

It was the fourth morning following. Anshel had started out quite early the previous day to collect accounts in the neighboring villages, and was not expected back till late that evening. Zillah was in the sick-room; she had hardly stirred from it during the last three days. Her mother wondered at it, but she took it as she took every other blessing, without inquiry. She knew it was dangerous to question one's good fortune.

Enoch had been hovering about the house aimlessly. He thought he had something to wait for—had not Zillah told him so? He had repeated her words to himself time and again; at first they sounded sweet, comforting, inspiring. And then—was it from the endless iteration?—they began to lose the edge of their import. And now, as he recalled them, sitting in his attic with the tremendous tome of Talmudic lore in front of him, they seemed hollow and lifeless, for they roused in him no responsive thrill. From that he knew he had lost faith in them. Anchorite though he was, he had learnt so much of the world's ways, that if a woman would show favor to a man, her features, however tense with pain, would soften at his approach, her vacant eyes would become suffused with light and life. Zillah's did nothing of the kind. Ah, it was a difficult question—much more difficult than any of those propounded in Treatise Baba Kama. But he would have it answered this day.

Salka was in the shop. Somehow she was glad of this new partition of labor between her and her sister; it kept her for the most part out of her mother's presence, and what had formerly appeared to her a deprivation, now came to her as a relief. She felt guilty; she had not yet taken herself to account as to the extent and origin of the feeling, because so far it was sufficiently strong to override all attempts at self-analysis. It resulted in a state of helpless bewilderment, which as often as not overshadowed her perception of outward things.

That was apparently the case with her at present, or else she would long ago have noticed the lanky gendarme who was promenading up and down the street, and casting a vexed look into the shop each time he passed it. And so she started up half-frightened as suddenly he clanked in.

"I want two copecks worth of pipe-clay," he said, looking round inquisitively.

"Pipe-clay? We don't sell any here."

"Yes, you do—I bought some the other day; the tall young lady with the big, shining eyes served me."

A light dawned on Salka. Swiftly she walked to the backdoor.

"Zillah, I want you," she called up.

Her voice trembled, but she did not know it.

A minute passed, and then Zillah appeared; her first glance caught the gendarme.

"A message?" she asked.

The man nodded, and looked towards Salka, who had stepped to the other counter.

"She does not matter," Zillah impatiently replied to the look.

"I was ordered to give it to nobody but you," he explained, handing her the note, "so as to make sure it reached you."

Zillah read it through, read it again and again, as the man augured from the time she took in the perusal; it was not such a very long letter.

"I shall send the answer later, through some one else," she informed him at last.

The man hesitated. Zillah repeated her words. Then he went, his head high in the air. He was rather proud of the pipe-clay idea.

"Here," said Zillah, holding the letter out to Salka. The latter took it, although her trembling fingers almost refused her service.

"My despatches have arrived," she read; "I am to be given the post on condition that I report myself at Samarkand by noon on the fifth day from this. We must go by the seven o'clock train to-night: or, at the latest, we can leave at nine in the locomotive car, which will be in time to meet the South Line train at the junction. If you have not sent your answer by seven, I know you will bring it yourself at nine."

"To-night, then," said Salka, her gaze riveted on the missive. Zillah did not answer, so that Salka fancied she had only thought, not spoken the words.

"To-night, then," she repeated more loudly.

"God! do I not know it without your dinning it into my ears?" cried Zillah.

"I thought you would be glad," ventured Salka, timidly.

"Of course I am glad—so glad that I am jealous of showing it. Only I thought it would not be so soon."

"When did you expect it?"

"In a month, in a year—and there would be a chance of my being dead before then. It is true, though, he gave me warning that he would want me speedily, now that I come to think of it," she went on, almost rambling, "but I did not believe he meant it; I did not believe this meant anything save a blind, undiscerning happiness that looked neither behind nor in front. And now that I must use my sight, it hurts. Yes, Salka, it hurts."

Entreatingly she turned her blanched face to her sister; in the garish sunshine it looked piteously wan and drawn.

Salka crushed the Commissioner's letter with feverish fingers.

"You are not going," she said, coming closer to Zillah; "you don't want to go. Your courage is failing you."

A glad smile relaxed Zillah's features. She clutched Salka's hand.

"Ah, you are my angel, as ever," she broke out; "you need but open your lips, and help comes. Indeed, it is merely my courage has deserted me—not my desire. Only I did not know it till you told me. Should I not be frightened to give myself into a stranger's keeping, one of whom I know nothing save that I love him? And perhaps love may not be a safe touchstone—perhaps there is some alloy where my heart would fain only discover refined gold. All these things are a hazard, a life and death hazard, and is it to be wondered at that a weak woman like me shrinks from staking her all upon it? But now there

remains only one course: to cast misgivings to the wind, to be brave and fearless, to trust that what God makes us do is surely for the best. Salka, I shall go."

Pensively the younger sister gazed out at the apple-tree that stood sentry outside the shop, and now seemed to be shaking its yellowish leaves in disapproval.

"Is it worth it?" she asked at last.

"You mean is it worth father and mother and you? I don't know; did I not say it was a hazard? I only know that if I lose, I shall not be sorry—because I should not dare to be."

A long silence followed. Salka spoke first.

"Father will not be home before eight."

"Yes, I have been thinking of that," said Zillah.

"You will want to see him; and so you will not be able to go before nine. In the meantime the Com—— he will be waiting for an answer. Let me take it to him."

Salka's dispassionate voice contrasted curiously with Zillah's eager accents as she replied:

"Oh, Salka, I had intended to ask you, but I was afraid. I want to be with mother all I can; every hour I see her between now and to-night might have to serve me with its memory for a year."

"Why should you be afraid to ask me? Don't you remember, I still owe you a service?" answered Salka, in most business-like tone. One would think she had not noticed the pain that quivered through her sister's last words.

"I shall go over to the railway station shortly before seven," she continued; "I shall be sure to find him on

the platform. Would that not be best? You see he does not expect a message much before then."

And smoothing the crumpled paper, she held it before Zillah. The latter nodded; she had no need to look—she knew it well by heart.

"You are doing your best to make it hard for me, little sister," was all she said. And Salka knew what she meant.

Without another word Zillah went back to her mother. She must not waste the precious time; she must take a deep impress of the dear, dear features—deep enough to last her all her lifetime. Oh, yes, that was what it would come to; they would never forgive her—she would be dead to them. Her father would sit in the mourner's chair, mourning her for the prescribed seven days, and ever after observe the date of her flight as the anniversary of her passing. With a sob she pressed one hand to her eyes, but the terrible picture would not vanish.

So she groped her way up the stairs. At the top she came face to face with Enoch. He looked at her with the curious, hungry gaze with which she was well acquainted, but before he had time to utter a word, she had opened the door and disappeared.

With a sinking heart he crept down into the shop. But Salka had heard him coming, and was stooping over an account-book, adding up long rows of figures. Calmly she went on with them as he entered. Enoch watched her a little, waiting vainly to see her turn her face upon him, and then with a sigh he went back to his attic. So his fate was sealed. Even Salka, kind, sweet-voiced, warm-hearted Salka, whom he had made

the receptacle of his doubts and anxieties, and who had ever requited his confidence with her sympathy, even Salka flouted him. Yes, he was only torturing himself in vain.

But it was not the ledger Salka was so busy with; it was a reckoning of her own, and she was well aware that the sight of Enoch might in some way interfere with her result. And at that result she must arrive quickly; time was pressing.

The day sped on, both for Zillah and Salka, with relentless rapidity. Zillah was calm—the stillness of a dammed-up torrent. But Salka held her feelings less under lock and key. As the afternoon wore on, a fever of impatience painted her pale face with crimson eagerness. Her brain had become a machine of blood and tissue, and its wheels were revolving restlessly, straining their sweep and compass without mercy, to achieve their task betimes. And at last, towards evening, the color began to fade, for her thoughts no longer hustled and jostled each other; they were shaping themselves out of chaos into a compact resolve. So she sat back in her chair, closing her eyes like one who has done his work well, and can afford to wait patiently for the issue.

About a quarter to seven, Zillah, or something that looked very much like her, came down and said:—

"Had you not better go now?"

"Yes," and Salka rose readily; "what shall I tell him?"

"Tell him that I shall come at nine."

Salka had to strain her ears so as to catch the words. With a swift movement she drew down Zillah's head,

and touched her lips with her own. At the same time she looked deep into her eyes. What she saw in them made her heart give a bound of delight. Clearly she read there as from a manuscript on which Zillah's soul had penned: "Save me from myself!"

The next moment Salka was out in the street, traversing the distance to the station with flying feet. Quickly she recapitulated to herself the reflections that had helped her to her resolution. She would save her sister—that had been her starting-point all along. It was not fulfilling a duty, it was only a chance, given her by God's mercy, of redeeming herself from a deadly sin. At the eleventh hour, as it were, the film of blindness had been withdrawn from her vision. She had seen, and had stood shuddering as before an abyss. She had been content for the sake of an iniquitous love, of which the gratification was at best uncertain and precarious, to pay the price of a sister's undoing and disownment, to pay for it with her parents' broken hearts. She was the parricide—not Zillah. Had Zillah not said, that but for her prompting, her encouragement, she might never have had the fortitude to cast herself afloat on those strange seas beyond?

And the sinful desire which had not yet entirely taken its sting from out her bosom? It did not matter; it would count as nothing beside the gladness of her self-retrieving. It was a weed, and it would die of its own loathsomeness.

Thank God there was yet time.

She had come to the station turnstile that admitted on to the platform. The locomotive was getting up

steam; porters and passengers were hurrying in the wild pell-mell that precedes imminent departure. But in the midst of the confusion the tall figure of the Commissioner was striding up and down leisurely, his hands in his pockets. He knew the train would not leave without him unless he willed it so. Outwardly he was calm—so calm that no one would have suspected for a moment that he was envying the locomotive for being able to give vent to its feelings without running the risk of comment.

As he turned back, he caught sight of Salka in the dim lantern-light, and came quickly towards her.

"I was sure she would send a messenger," he said, eagerly. "So I must wait till nine?"

Salka's breath came fast. God help her now.

"You need not wait; my sister is not coming," she answered without a quaver.

Then she stepped back; in a moment the storm would break. Presently he would begin to fume and rave and threaten: already she seemed to feel his blows tingling on her face.

But no—he remained silent; and yet this silence was more terrible than would have been an avalanche of rage.

After a while his lips moved.

"Why not?" She almost had to guess the question.

"Because she belongs to a race which imparted to the world the commandment: 'Thou shalt honor thy father and mother,'" replied Salka, mechanically. She had conned her lesson well.

"Where is she?" he asked suddenly.

"At home."

"Then I shall fetch her," he said, turning on his heel.

Salka's heart beat like a sledge-hammer.

"It is useless, your Honor," she said, following him and laying her hand on his arm; "it is useless, I assure you. You will find her at her mother's bedside. Her mother has not left her couch for three years, but she will be strong as a tigress when it comes to struggling for her child, and I think you can guess on whose side will be the victory."

He had stopped and was looking at her dazed; then he said: "Yes, I can guess. She asked you to tell me all this—she, your sister?"

"She asks you to forgive her and to forget her. She says she will pray every day to our God for your welfare; she will beg Him to make you the equal of the greatest in the land, to be good to you for the sake of the goodness you had promised her."

He seemed to be waking from his trance.

"Goodness?" he uttered with a bitter laugh. "What goodness? I had promised her my love, my name,—but there was no kindness in that; it was only selfishness. I wanted her heart though she brought it to me bleeding from a thousand wounds. And therefore your God has punished me for it, and has taken from me what I coveted so greedily, in the very hour I had hoped for its attainment. Ah! this old God of yours is very powerful; yes, let her pray to Him for me, to send me comfort, even as He has sent punishment. Oh, must I believe it? She will not come—is she sure she will not? There is still time, you know——"

Salka shook her head; her heart was too full for speech. He was strong, indeed, the God of Israel, and more than that, He protected His children.

The iron horse on the rails stood champing and quivering; presently it snorted. The Commissioner came close to Salka on the spur of a sudden thought.

"When did you kiss her last?" he asked.

The girl looked at him in terror—had he gone mad?

"When?" he repeated.

"Just before I came here," she replied, trembling.

The next instant he had caught her tight, his beard was grazing her face, his lips burnt on hers. Then he let her go.

"I have not been cheated out of that at least," he said; "it was to have been mine when we were to meet with no parting before us. Tell her she has given it to me by proxy. My Madonna of the frontier! She will know how much I loved her, if I can leave her."

He turned quickly, and made his way into the compartment.

The guard signalled—the steam horse gathered itself up and moved.

The Commissioner stood at the window, and waved his hand to Salka.

* * * * * * * * *

Salka remained on the platform long after the rear-lights of the train had become swallowed up in the darkness. With a sigh that was more a sob, she started on her way home. She was safe—her sister was safe.

All that now remained was to tell her so. When she

reached the house, she found Zillah in the kitchen counting the contents of a little iron casket.

"This is all I am going to take with me," she said without looking up; "about a hundred roubles I have saved; I may need them."

"You will not need them—at least not to-night," replied Salka.

Zillah raised her head.

"Then he has put off his departure?" she asked, her eyes radiant with a flash of hope. "Have his despatches been revoked?"

"No, they have not been revoked. He has gone."

"Gone?"

"I saw the train carry him away—I swear to you I saw it. I told him that you had changed your mind, that you could not bear to desert your parents on earth and your Father in heaven—that you would die of it; and he went away to prove how he loved you. You can kill me for it, but I could not do otherwise."

Zillah listened, and her face became transfigured.

"You say that this was your doing?" came slowly from her. "You flatter yourself. It was not yours—it was my good angel's; he has entered into you, he has taken your shape and voice. I have missed him these last days; he had abandoned me, and had taken my conscience with him. Or else would I not have heeded my mother when she asked me to be a true daughter to her? I knew I was rushing into the arms of my evil destiny, but I did not struggle, for dimly, darkly I felt that help would come in the extremest hour of the peril. Salka, what can I do to repay you?"

"You can marry Enoch," replied Salka, quickly; "you owe it, not to me, but to your parents; it will be your reparation for the wrong you all but did them. Hush!"

She held up her finger warningly. Enoch was heard descending the staircase.

"Can you oblige me with a piece of cord?" he asked, stopping at the door.

"For what purpose, pray?" asked Salka.

"I am packing—my train leaves at five to-morrow morning. I cannot afford to neglect my affairs any longer."

"Wait here a moment," said Salka, hurrying out. "I shall look for some upstairs."

He took a step forward, and stood gazing vacantly into a corner. Suddenly he felt a light touch on his hand. Zillah was quite close to him.

"And suppose I am one of your affairs?" she asked with downcast eyes.

"Zillah!" he shouted.

She raised her glance, and looked at him solemnly. She saw the tears in his eyes, and silently tightened her clasp on his hand.

Five minutes afterwards Anshel's vehicle pulled up outside the door. Salka stood on the step.

"News, good news," she whispered to him.

But Anshel needed no telling. He had guessed.

MUMMER AND MORALIST

EVERYBODY in the town called them "Mella" and "Uscher," which is Yiddish for "Darby and Joan," or, more correctly, "Joan and Darby," the Yiddish herein showing off to greater advantage than the English by its *place aux dames*. This might give rise to the misapprehension that Mella and Uscher were a married couple. So let it be stated at once that both members of the combination belonged to the male sex; but as they were more inseparable, and did almost as much quarrelling, as most husbands and wives, they had a fairly good right to the appellation. Indeed, the nickname had so engrafted itself on their own minds that they neither knew nor called each other by anything else. The two had come to Borstchick on their travels —the word must not suggest tourist tickets—and either Mella or Uscher, they had long forgotten which, had fallen ill and had been nursed well again at the "Hekdish," the itinerant paupers' ward. Out of gratitude they had resolved to make the town a gift of their valuable presences. They were now almost middle-aged men, and acted as factotums to the little place. They went errands, executed commissions, did a little corn-brokering, helped to make the prayer-quorum at houses of mourning, and by all sorts of odd jobs tried to keep their balance-sheet even.

If they could at all be said to have a profession, apart from being jacks-of-all-trades, it would be that of

"batchan," or "poyatz," or "marshallik," all of which mean accredited buffoons who give their entertainments on occasions of family festivities. In private, the two had come to look upon themselves as flesh of one flesh and bone of one bone, and the scurrilous abuse which they levelled against each other on most occasions was merely the overflow of their mutual affections, besides keeping their hands, or, rather, their tongues, in at their business. So, for instance, Mella was small and wizened, Uscher large and fleshy, and this would give rise to comments of this sort:—

"Mella, I have an idea you will never die; and why? Because it is only people with souls that die. But where is there room for a soul in a midget like you?"

"And when you die, Uscher," would be the quick retort, "the angel of death will ask the Almighty for a new slaughtering-knife; and why? Because he will think he has slaughtered a pig in error."

"Transgressor in Israel!"

"Eater of swine's flesh!"

"Apostate!"

"Sabbath-drudge!"

"That reminds me," continued Uscher as if nothing had happened, "that reminds me that you have not yet breakfasted; you must be hungry. Let me run to Lieb Klapka, the huckster, and fetch bread and herrings."

"No, Uscher, let me go myself—it is very wet: your boots leak, and you have a cough."

"Don't prate, I shall go."

"No, I shall."

"Obstinate."

"Sheep's head."

"Fool's carcass."

"Beast of the field." And so the tussle would begin over again.

But despite the numerous strings to their bow, things were sometimes very fine-cut in the Mella-cum-Uscher household, especially in winter, when open-air transactions became very irksome. And therefore it seemed to them a special dispensation of Providence that just in winter should fall the Jewish festivals whereon merry-making is much encouraged. First, though somewhat early in the season, comes the Rejoicing in the Law. Then there is the Festival of Lights, on which the memory of the Maccabees is made much of, and finally the Feast of Lots. Of the three, Mella and Uscher preferred the Festival of Lights by a long way. For one thing, it spreads over eight days, and therefore gives wide scope for a good harvest. It is also a favorite time for engagement parties and marriages, when the hearts of men are light, and a copeck or two is not a matter of much account. Consequently, Mella and Uscher made good use of their opportunities, mapping out a seven nights' programme; the eighth, of course, was accounted for by the intervening Sabbath eve, when the handling of money, even in charity, is among things forbidden. Every evening they made a raid on another house, confining themselves to men of note in the congregation, and, by preference, to those who were celebrating some joyous event.

When Uscher came home on the day preceding this particular Festival of Lights, he found Mella looking thoughtful and downcast.

"What ails you, you scum of the earth?" he asked solicitously.

"I shall tell you," replied Mella, for once neglecting to return the compliment. "I have been thinking over this poyatz business of ours, and I have become very dissatisfied with it."

"No doubt," jeered Uscher, "you would prefer to be made Warden of the congregation—an evil spirit into your father!"

"Not that," went on Mella, heedless of the imprecation; "but it has struck me it is not fit and proper for men of our years to play antics in public, and call each other names, and bespatter one the other with abuse, just to make people laugh. Of course, what we do when by ourselves, and for our own diversion, is a different matter. But yesterday I found a grey hair in my beard, and—and Uscher, as I live, I blushed, and thanked God I have no children."

"Yes, it is true," agreed Uscher, becoming very serious. "But how is a bear first made to dance? He is put on an oven-plate, with his forefeet over the fire, and when they begin to feel hot, he tries to stand upon his hind feet, which are on a spot where the oven is cold. In the same way I feel hot and cold at one and the same time, when I think of how to get my livelihood—and, therefore, I dance. What are we to do?"

"That is the difficult part," said Mella, mournfully. "I have been racking my brain over it all the morning. If we had a few hundred roubles, we might set up a shop and make good bargains and live respectably. But who is to give us a few hundred roubles?"

"Who?" echoed Uscher, in sepulchral tone.

The two sat silent. After a while Mella resumed. "I have an idea. We can certainly not give up the poyatz business for the present; but," and a hopeful look came into his eyes, "we can improve it."

Uscher looked up interrogatively.

"Yes," continued Mella, "instead of playing farces and buffooneries, can we not concoct a piece that has a moral in it—something to instruct and elevate the minds of those who listen? What else does the Maggid, the travelling preacher? He tells the people stories, and from them they draw a conclusion how to act and how not to act. And you see with what respect he is treated wherever he comes. Let us try also to please and teach people, without making a laughing-stock of ourselves. Look here."

He rummaged in a tattered portfolio, until he succeeded in fishing out a dilapidated manuscript.

"This is from my elder brother, who is Precentor and Slaughterer in Skulm—a great scholar," he explained with pride. "He sent it me three years ago, it may be—see, it is written in the holy language. Ah, poyatz though I am, I have not forgotten all I learned in the Talmud Academy at Vilosen. Come, listen."

He spread the sheet carefully on the table, took out his horn-rimmed spectacles, and translated:

"To my beloved brother, towards whom my soul is stretching out its arms in loving desire. Verily, it is a long time since news has passed between us, and I write this to ascertain if thou art indeed yet to be counted among the living."

"What has that to do with your idea?" queried Uscher, impatiently.

"Wait a minute," said Mella, and read on leisurely:

"It is in truth a sad and sorrowful thing that sons of one father and mother should dwell asunder. But complaint is the fool's remedy for sorrow. Rather will I proceed to give thee tidings concerning myself. In the first place, then, my wife has—praised be the Name—borne me yet another daughter, so that the number of my offspring has risen to twelve—a holy number, inasmuch as such was the total of the tribes of Israel."

"May the tribes of Israel be damaged," shouted Uscher, recklessly. "Why don't you come to the root of the matter?"

"I am coming to it now," and Mella resumed with much more expedition: "As to the question of my fortunes, they are such as they are, only somewhat worse than they should be,—praised be the Name,—especially as Peretz Wedel, who was the butcher of most account in the neighborhood, has left the town, so that there has been great abatement in my source of income from slaughtering."

"May you and your brother and Peretz Wedel all meet in Gehennom," cried Uscher, exasperated.

"Presently, presently," said Mella, preoccupied with his letter, which continued thus:—

"But the way and manner in which Peretz Wedel left the town is a thing calling for special comment, and I shall relate to thee in all detail in what fashion he parted from his wife. For I was at the time in my slaughter-house, sharpening my knife for the geese, which at this season are killed in great numbers, and it happens that the poultry-shambles are divided from

Peretz Wedel's dwelling only by a thin partition. For he lived close by, he being the Treasurer for the Krupka, the killing-tax, to wit. So listen, for it will give thee great insight into the ways of certain men in the treatment of their wives."

Mella paused, out of breath, and looked significantly at Uscher. Then he recommenced his reading, and Uscher at first listened with a sullen look on his face. Then gradually his eyes brightened with interest, and as Mella ran on, the narrative gripped him, and held his attention till the end.

"I see your meaning now," he said, when Mella had stopped; "you would have us rehearse this scene which took place between Peretz and his wife, so that husbands may take warning not to go and do likewise."

"That was exactly my meaning," replied Mella. "Let us learn the words such as they are transcribed in my brother's letter, and when we go into the houses and are called upon to entertain the assembly, we shall set forth this thing as it happened. And there will be no need to make grimaces, but we must speak the words with a countenance no less staid than the Maggid's."

"I am of your mind entirely," said Uscher, "only let us hasten, for to-morrow the festival begins."

"And to-morrow, too, is the *Tnoyim* at Benjamin the baker's, when his daughter is to be promised in marriage to Rummle Klinker, the cattle dealer, and there is to be a great feast. And where is it a more fitting place to speak of these things than in the presence of those who are shortly to be joined in wedlock?"

"Where, indeed? Tell me, Mella, who is this Rummle Klinker?"

"There you know as much as I do—how he came here two, or it may be three, years ago, and being possessed of some little wealth, as it appeared, and being withal no stupid-head, soon became a man of note in the congregation; and being, moreover, a bachelor, though no more in his first youth, he was in great request for a son-in-law among the masters of houses. And now he is going to marry Blumah, the baker's daughter, the prettiest girl in the town."

"They say there is not much love in the matter—on her side," said Uscher in a half-whisper.

"They say," echoed Mella, scornfully. "I can swear to it; not for nothing have I gone in and out of Benjamin's house these many years. The bridegroom she would like to have is Rophel, the sexton's son—a golden young man, I tell you—a head on wheels; did he not pass all the eight classes of the Gymnasium in two years—overnight, so to speak? But, then, he is poor, and a poor man's knowledge dies in his belly, as the saying is. I should give two copecks to the charity box, if some miracle should happen, and Rophel should marry Blumah after all."

"What is the use of talking about miracles?" said the more matter-of-fact Uscher. "Can you perform miracles? If you can, pray make me a millionaire immediately. What difference does it make who marries Blumah? Rather let us come to the business in hand."

Thereupon commenced an eager discussion how the whole thing was to be arranged. The apportioning of the parts was an easy question, in which they were mainly guided by their respective physiques, Uscher

being cut out for the husband, and Mella for the wife. The question of costume was also satisfactorily settled. All that was necessary would be a skirt and a shawl for Mella, and though his scraggy little beard somewhat discounted him as a type of perfect femininity, all the more scope would be left to the audience for exercising their powers of idealization. The whole day long they went hammer and tongs at the rehearsing of their parts, and on the morrow they felt certain that this new departure in their line of business would effect a great sensation.

The whole town was astir with the engagement of Blumah, the baker's daughter, to Rummle Klinker, the rich cattle dealer. "Bread to meat, a good match," the joke went round. Everybody who was anybody had been invited, and intended to come; and in honor of the occasion old Benjamin had baked a Sabbath loaf which, for dimensions, was the eighth wonder of the world. In the evening the reception-room was lighted up by nine candelabra, seven of which Mother Riffka had borrowed from the neighbors.

At the head of the table sat Blumah and Rummle; the former pale, her eyes downcast with a suspicion of redness, the result of weeping, about them. But then it was natural; was she not soon to leave her parents' house? Rummle had a smug and complacent air, an impression produced chiefly by a lavish expanse of loud-colored waistcoat. Every now and then he shot a sideway glance at his silent bride, to find out what caused that startled shiver to run through her each time he took her hand in his. At the farthest end of the room, crouching back deep into the window

niche, sat Rophel, the gymnasiast who had passed the eight classes of the High School in two years, and wondered if by passing eight more he might learn how to drive the gnawing pain out of his heart.

Suddenly a stir ran round the gathering.

"The players have come," went from mouth to mouth. "Now we shall hear something—no doubt they will excel themselves to-night."

A burst of uproarious laughter greeted Mella and Uscher as they entered. They were used to this kind of reception, and, therefore, did not feel disconcerted. So they waited till the merriment had subsided, and then Mella stepped forward and said:

"My masters, it has hitherto been our custom to amuse you with clown tricks and with things that provoke much laughter. But, henceforth, it is our resolve to be no longer poyatzes, but, by enacting scenes of serious import, teach you lessons with regard to the ordering of your lives. And for a sample we shall submit to your approval a tragedy entitled 'The Deserted Wife.'"

Scarcely had he finished, when the laughter broke out again with redoubled force. Mella and Uscher play a tragedy—the "Deserted Wife," with Mella, as was evident from his get-up, in the title rôle—it was too funny! Even the sad-faced Blumah indulged in a momentary smile, and Rophel, who was devouring her from behind the window-drapery, felt a sullen anger shoot through him; how could she smile when he was aching himself crazy with secret sorrow? The only one who, to the watchful eye of Uscher, seemed to be taking the matter in its proper light, was the bride-

groom himself. He kept quite serious—indeed, so serious, that he could pour himself out a glass of neat brandy with a steady hand, and swallow it at one gulp. And Rummle Klinker was probably old enough to know what a dangerous thing it is to pour raw spirits down one's throat, if one feels the slightest inclination to laugh. Mella was right—Rummle was, indeed, no stupid-head, and, therefore, would, Uscher hoped, value their services at their full worth.

Much encouraged by this reflection, Uscher determined to put his heart and soul into the business. Quickly a space was cleared for the stage, and the requisite scenery furnished in the shape of a stool. The piece began with a soliloquy of Mella, who, seated on the said stool, commenced to rock himself violently, pulled at his hair with great gusto, and gave other indications of being in a perturbed state of mind.

"Oh, a sorrow has come upon my young years, a destruction and a blight on my innocent blood," he wailed. "Woe, woe is me! What have I done to deserve this? Have I not duly taken tithe of the dough for the Sabbath bread—have I not sanctified the candles every Friday eve—have I not strictly kept apart the crockery that may be used for meat, and that which may be used for butter? Have I not observed all the injunctions which our Holy Law has laid upon us housewives? But it was all in vain, and I shall be left solitary with my two little children whom their father has cast off, for an evil spirit has crept into his understanding.—Vy, vy, vy, woe is me!"

This was the cue for Uscher to come on; but it was taken up instead by the audience, which had been

struggling with its mirth, and now let it escape in a tremendous guffaw. The idea of Mella performing the duties of a Jewish matron, Mella deserted with two little children—it was screamingly absurd!

Uscher looked round indignantly. The blockheads! Could they not grasp that all this was meant in earnest? And then he caught Rummle's face; it looked sober and serious. Here at least was a man of intelligence, who saw the drift and purpose of their action, and no doubt would explain it to the others. So, seizing on a momentary lull, he strutted up, and addressed Mella.

"Art thou not a piece of folly? What is the use of thy lamentations? I tell thee my resolve is fixed; not all the rains that fall between Holy Convocation and the first day of Passover shall wash it away."

At this place Mella did not give the audience time to laugh, but went on at once:

"Peretz, why art thou determined to put this shame upon me? When I shall go out, the women will point their fingers at me and jeer: 'Look, there she goes who gave her husband the topmost of the potatoes, and the bottommost of the soup, and, therefore, he has left her to her own devices.'"

"I do not care what the women will say—that is their business; but as for me, I cannot help that God has put this distaste for thee into my heart. And, therefore, is it not the best thing for the pair of us that I should get me gone, inasmuch as it will save us wrangling and quarrelling such as must needs result where the husband and wife are not of one understanding? As soon as I can, I shall send thee the divorce by two witnesses."

"I shall not take thy divorce," shrieked Mella. "I shall wait till God has changed thy mind, and thou returnest. Oh, Peretz, what is to become of me and our two little ones?"

"What is to become of you?" cried Uscher, with great show of exasperation. "Do ye go and die the healthiest death ye can find; and do not wait for my return, for I am going away to find myself a maiden with a face and a pair of shoulders——"

Uscher could not go on, for here a great burst of hilarity interrupted his speech. Trembling with anger, he cast his eyes round the gathering, which had turned into a screaming, kicking, side-shaking mass of laughing humanity. But when he looked at Rummle, a great fright came over him, for Rummle's face was the color of chalk, and his eyes were starting from their sockets.

"The bridegroom—look," he cried, at the top of his voice, pointing to Rummle. In an instant every gaze was fastened on the latter.

"It is nothing," said Rummle, thrusting away those who had rushed to his assistance; "the heat has overpowered me—see, I can stand again firmly on my feet, but I beg you will excuse me for leaving you. A good night's rest will be the best medicine for me. Let not the festivity be interrupted on my account."

A great confusion followed his words, in the midst of which he made his escape. The guests prepared to take their leave—it was stupid: who ever heard of an engagement party without a bridegroom? And when the young men who had followed Rummle to his house came back, and reported that he had locked his door, and would not admit any one, there was much whisper-

ing and shaking of heads; it did not seem as though the blessing of Heaven rested on the match. Rophel had somehow elbowed his way to Blumah, and if they clasped hands for a moment, and looked deep into each other's eyes, there could be no wrong in it. Had not Rummle gone away without putting a ring on Blumah's finger?

Mella and Uscher slunk home as disconsolately as wolves with scalded hides. They had been hustled out somewhat unceremoniously, and, of course, there could be no thought of making the customary collection.

"Satan, the envious, has caused this confusion," said Mella, sadly; "he was afraid that the moral of our tale would turn the hearts of men from evil. For he knew how cunningly we had tricked it out with words of advice and exhortation, and the best part was yet to come. Ah! the moral of it—the beautiful moral of it."

"Pickle your moral in vinegar and onions," growled Uscher, who took the occurrence less philosophically; "for, at this rate of payment, it is all you are likely to have for breakfast, dinner, and supper."

"Do not lose heart," said Mella, reassuringly; "remember, this is only the first eve of the festival; we shall recoup ourselves on the others."

This was Mella's honest intention, which only one unforeseen circumstance interfered with. On the following morning he found that, consequent on the difference of the temperature between the warm room and the cold night air, he had contracted a severe chill, which in turn contracted his throat, and only allowed his voice to come forth in the shadow and semblance of its usual self. This naturally precluded any imme-

diate idea of repeating the performance. Uscher watched him, looking haggard and woe-begone, but without a murmur at their ill-luck. About midday he went out for a little while to fetch provisions, and when he came back his face had the air of one who brings strange tidings.

"Do you know, Mella, that the bridegroom of yesterday, Rummle Klinker, has left the town?"

"Well, he will come back," croaked Mella, hoarsely.

"That he will not, because he has disposed of his household and his business. Very early this morning he came to Lieb Klapka, the huckster, who just told me the tale, and before the people had come from the morning service the whole transaction was done—Lieb had bought the property, not at a loss to himself, as he says, and Rummle had started on his journey. Whither he has gone no one knows."

"What does one not hear!" said Mella, shaking his head as much as his stiff neck would allow him. "And now, perhaps, Rophel will marry Blumah."

"My trouble," commented Uscher, implying it was *not* his trouble, and that he had other things to concern him.

And, indeed, all day he was busy nursing his comrade, poulticing him, applying fomentations, and attending to his every little want, the same as a mother to her sick child. When the evening came, Mella grew restless.

"Are you in pain?" queried Uscher.

"No, but I think you should go out and see what you can do for the earning of a few copecks. I don't speak for my own interest. Remember, I am sick, and

my appetite is not over great, but hunger will press heavily on you who have a healthy stomach."

"What, go out and leave you alone with your sickness?" cried Uscher, indignantly. "If I should hunger, all the more necessity is there for me to make you well as quickly as possible, so that we may both go speedily about our business."

Mella did not insist, only when Uscher brought him the hot gruel, he caught his hand and pressed it tightly, and looked at him with tear-glittering eyes.

However, despite Uscher's ministrations, Mella's illness dragged for over a week, and then his convalescence required almost another week for itself. On the first day he could sally forth he received a surprise in the shape of a letter from his brother, the precentor and licensed slaughterer of Skulm, the first one since that which had given him the suggestion of becoming a great moralist.

"To my dear loved brother, the sight of whom may God grant me as a balsam for my soul," Mella read aloud for the benefit of Uscher, who looked inquisitive.

"Though it be only after the passing of much time that my hand is stretched forth to give thee tidings, verily in my heart thou art not forgotten. These, then, are the things I have to tell of.

"In the matter of children I have no further increase to report. The two eldest are wedded happily, and the others are growing up as cedars on Mount Lebanon, gladdening my eyes with their goodliness. Also in the matter of my livelihood I have—praised be the Name—tidings of a joyful nature; and the improvement thereof is due to the same cause to which was due the falling-

off. And the wonder of the whole thing is so strong upon me that I must needs relate to thee the matter in all detail. Perhaps it still dwells in thy memory what I wrote to thee in my last epistle concerning one named Peretz Wedel, the same who was Overseer of the Krupka, with regard to the casting off of his wife. As for the woman, she herself is virtuous and God-fearing, a pearl among the matrons of Israel. And all during her husband's absence she uttered no word of reproach, but spent her time in fasting and praying that God might make him of a better mind, nor did she teach her children to curse the name of their father, as might well betide under the circumstances. And who shall say that the Lord of the Universe does not hearken to the voice of His righteous ones? For listen what miracle was effected on her behalf.

"A week ago, or a little more, I happened to be seated in my slaughter-box, sharpening my knives, as usual when there is nothing to do; and suddenly, from the other side of the wall, where is the apartment wherein the woman dwells with her children—one single room, whereas before she had inhabited the whole house—suddenly, as I said, I heard a shriek, so loud that my hand swerved, and a serious blemish was caused to the knife, which it cost me an hour's labor to remove. And subsequently upon the shriek I heard a man's voice speak, and my soul shook within me, for I recognized it as the voice of Peretz Wedel, the runaway husband, and the words he was saying were these:—

"'Channa, I was within a hair's breadth of committing a great sin, which would make me accursed in the

world to come, but God had mercy on me, and in a good hour sent me a sign from Heaven. Therefore have I come back to thee, and if thy heart is not poisoned against me by my cruelty to thee and my little children, take me back, and let all be forgotten.'

"And then there was a sound of sobbing, interspersed with such detonations as are caused when two kiss each other on the mouth violently.

"But this is not all; for, from certain indications, I have ascertained that during his absence Peretz abided in the town of Borstchick, which is the self-same town where thou art a house-master, respected and beloved by all, as thou sayest, for which God be thanked. And to recall him to thy mind, if his name be not familiar to thee, I shall give thee certain marks of his appearance. He is of great girth about the waist, and on his forehead is a wart, not so large as the horn which God caused to appear on the forehead of Queen Vashti when she was summoned into the presence of King Achashverush, but certainly of considerable size. And over his left eye there is no hair-covering, for the brow was singed away when he was quite a boy——"

Mella paused suddenly, and looked at Uscher, who returned his glance dispassionately.

"Don't you see, Uscher?" he cried excitedly.

"See what?"

"Whom he means—the hairless eyebrow, the wart on the forehead—don't you see who it is?"

"Then speak, in God's name—who is it?" cried Uscher, catching the excitement.

"Why, none other than Rummle Klinker; has he not a wart on——?"

"Cry shame on my stupidity," gasped Uscher, throwing up his hands. "I have a pumpkin on me for a head—of course, it is he, and——"

"And the sign from Heaven is the piece we acted, giving the exact words of his disownment, such as my brother transcribed them to me faithfully," shrieked Mella.

The pair stood gaping at each other in dumbfounded wonder. At last Mella opened his mouth, and shouted triumphantly:

"Ah! I knew it—the moral, the beautiful moral; has it not come home? Have we not done more than what ten Maggidim, preaching ten days, with tongues ten yards long, could have effected?"

"Yes, and we have received as much pay," sneered Uscher. "Are you not an ass, Mella? The only one who has been benefited is Rummle's wife—go and get your payment from her."

"It is enough for me to have been made the instrument of Providence," said Mella, piously.

"The instrument of Providence!" echoed Uscher, hotly. "Say, rather, you have meddled with Providence that intended you for nothing but a poyatz, and certainly not for a moralist. And, therefore, have you been punished; for if you had kept to your proper trade, what would have happened? In the first place, there would have been no disturbance at Benjamin's house at the party, we should not have frightened Rummle away, and we should have been handsomely rewarded by him, not only at the *Tnoyim*, but also at the marriage feast, which was to have followed shortly. And, further, you could have made an orderly exit from the house, duly

protected against the night air, and then you would not have fallen ill, and all the money we might have earned during the festival would not have been lost. And now," he flapped his arms violently to beat down the protest he saw rising to Mella's lips, "and now what have you got? Nothing—nay, you are poorer by the two copecks which you have vowed to the charity box, if Rophel should marry Blumah; and that he is going to marry her I have on good authority. You see, the blessing of God was not upon your doings. It is willed we should eat our bread in humiliation."

Mella stood annihilated. "If it is indeed God's will that I should be a poyatz all my lifetime, well, then, in God's name let it be; but——"

A knock at the door cut him short. It was the postman, who left a packet addressed to the two of them.

"Look, Uscher, it is franked and registered," cried Mella. "What does it contain?"

"Open and see, you besom-stock," answered Uscher, out of all patience. With trembling fingers, Mella broke the seals, and took out the contents—brand new rouble notes, dozens of them; five hundred roubles in all. Right at the bottom lay a scrap of paper with a few words scrawled on it, and when Mella had blinked the tears of joy and terror out of his eyes, he read:

"A token of gratitude from one whom, by a patent miracle of God, you saved from a great transgression."

"Say, Uscher," asked Mella, when he could feel his words come less flutteringly, "do you still think it is God's will we should be nothing but poyatzes—laughmakers?"

THE FOURTH DIMENSION

"THIS day I am become a happy man in Israel—blessed be the name of the Lord!" rose Tarphon's jubilant cry. The proof of his gladness lay in his face; but the cause of it lay in his arms—a huddled-up, swaddle-clothed heap of two-hour-old humanity. "It is a boy—that was bravely done of thee, Mirzah; now we shall have some one to say the Sanctification over us when we are dead."

"What ails thee, Tarphon?" said Mirzah, looking reproach with her big wan eyes, for she had not strength enough to lay it into her voice. "In the hour that new life is given us, to take the name of death into thy mouth? Thou knowest not what thou sayest in thy transport. Give me back the child before thou swallowest it with thine eyes."

"There, selfish one that thou art!" was the good-humored reply. "May I not hold him and touch him for a little while? Thou grudgest me the joy of fatherhood, perhaps, and yet it is the first time in the ten years of our wedlock that I have tasted it."

"Tarphon!" and the gathering tears in the big wan eyes said the rest.

"Foolish one, I was but jesting." And Tarphon stroked the limp hand that was stretched out to meet his. "I am very well satisfied with thee; he shall be a great scholar, and his fame shall ring through the world—that pleases thee, see, thou smilest—and no

less than two bullocks and ten sheep shall be eaten at his marriage feast. To be sure, I know not what I am saying—I shall go forth and tell the news in the town and in the houses of our friends and kinsfolk. Nay, let me look at him again—I shall not do him mischief."

No wonder that Tarphon was a little delirious. He was a man who had been blessed with chattels of many sorts; he owned man-servants and maid-servants, and his flocks cropped his own pastures for many an acre round. And now God had set this coping-stone upon his fortunes, and Tarphon was but human, and might be excused for not eying the event with stoic indifference. His excitement kept him on his legs till late in the afternoon, and when he came home he was very tired. "Not with the walking," he explained to Mirzah, "but with the load of good wishes I have brought for all the three of us." And then he sat down at the bedside, and thought for a long time.

"What sayest thou, Mirzah? I hold it is but right I should make some offering to the congregation, so that the birth of Tarphon's son may be remembered for many ages to come."

"When I am recovered, I and my sisters shall embroider a covering-cloth for the Reader's pulpit," suggested Mirzah.

"It will get worn out in a few years," objected Tarphon, "and the gift is not one of sufficient value."

"Then let it be a golden wine-beaker."

"That might get stolen. Nay, do not prompt me; I have the gift in my mind. I have heard much talk

to-day that Benish, the great scribe of Gostoneen, has finished the Scroll of the Law which he affirms to be the best handiwork of his lifetime, and he asks for it a large sum—I know not how much; but the harvest has been plentiful this year, and there has been no foot-rot among the sheep. I shall give what he asks —I shall not miss it."

So then, as proposed, Tarphon went to negotiate with Benish on the following morning; and when he entered, the expert was sitting in his scriptorium busily examining old parchments that needed repair.

"I have come about the scroll that I have heard say is the wonder of the world," began Tarphon.

"It is disposed of, or nearly so," answered Benish, "for the congregation of Wilna has offered me eleven hundred and fifty roubles for it."

"I will give you twelve hundred," said Tarphon.

"There is only one man can do that, and that is Tarphon of Stchelno."

"I am Tarphon, and yesterday a son was born to me; and I would present the scroll to the congregation in memory of it."

"The gift is worthy of the man and the occasion," said Benish; "you shall buy it. And now come and let me show it you."

And then from the inmost receptacle of his storing-place came forth the precious manuscript. It was of medium size and compact, nor yet so unwieldily bulky as many of the scrolls that weary the arms of the holders when they are carried about in procession on the Day of Rejoicing in the Law. And Benish's eyes glowed as he commented on its excellences.

"Ten years I have worked at it, and now every flourish is in its place, and the spacings and margins between the portions are measured to a hair. Look at the handles—solid ebony from the land of Kush, and the silk coverings at the back are such as the Indias cannot outvie."

And then he showed Tarphon the accoutrement and the accessories that belonged to the scroll; how the breastplate of solid silver was worked into the effigy of King Solomon's temple, with the peristyles and vestibules daintily fretted out from the bulk. And the large head-bells were of the shapes of crowns, and the clappers inside gave out a sound like cymbals. As for the pointer, the upper part was in form of a palm branch tapering off into a delicately chiselled hand.

"And all these things were fashioned by my son, the silversmith," added Benish, proudly. "I tell you, no finer scroll exists—unless it be the one from which the patriarchs read the Sabbath-portion in the Garden of Eden; and it is yours at the twelve hundred and fifty roubles you named."

Tarphon stood gazing with open mouth at the splendors before him, and he had not the heart to haggle about the extra fifty wherewith Benish had saddled him; the man deserved his price.

And when Tarphon came home, he told his wife: "I have beheld what no human eyes have seen; it was like drinking in the veritable glory of God."

"Nay, talk not so big," broke in Mirzah. "I, too, have been feasting mine eyes upon the shadow of the shadow thereof. But be still—he sleeps."

"The child—our child!" breathed Tarphon; and then he went on in a whisper, "What sayest thou to this, Mirzah: was it not at the hour of eight that he first drew breath? And Benish told me that was the instant when he put the last stroke to the writing of the scroll, having worked at it through the night into the morning; and so it might be said that they were born in the same winking of the eye. Is it not strange?"

"Strange?" said Mirzah. "Oh, thou niggard of faith! Is not God rich enough to dower the world with two blessings by one outstretching of the hand? Call it not strange; say rather it is a happy omen and foreshadowing that good fortune shall be his, having chanced upon such a coeval."

Then Tarphon stooped over the child, and, kissing it, he whispered, "Dear as is to the Almighty His Law, so be thou, His creature."

But there were many things that demanded attention, and Tarphon had his hands full for the next five days that elapsed before the child might be initiated into the Covenant of Abraham. And the memory of that initiation-feast is still current through the country, for from the mere remains of it full two weddings might have been furnished forth. And for the occasion there had come all the men of consideration and importance in the neighborhood; notably Rabbi Eliezar, the renowned Cabbalist, who, it was said, had once caught an angel by the foot, and would not let him go until he had been promised a foremost place in the World-to-come. Now he was blind and palsy-stricken, and it was only a man of Tarphon's

standing who might make bold to ask his company. And in the evening of the feast they brought the child, which had been named Ephraim, and laid it on the table before Rabbi Eliezar that he might give it his blessing; and he alone of all had been told of the wondrous coincidence that marked the finishing of the scroll and the birth of the child. And he laid his shrunken hand on little Ephraim's head, and, lifting his sightless eyes to heaven, he blessed him. Now, the old man was toothless, and his utterance was vague and confused; but those who sat near him thought that these were the words he spoke:

"As ye are both cast within one nativity, so may its soul be also thy soul, and than the soul of the Word of God there is no thing purer and wholesomer on earth. But the Eternal breathed into the limitless vast, and they became, and were, the four things that are His dimensions. And as thou shalt abide by the blessings of the twin-soul that is thine, so shalt thou abide by whatever else may betide it; and as one shall be, so shall be the other. And if the twin-soul pass all the trials thereof, then shall it live appointed days."

And all who heard wondered what the blessing meant; but there was no one to give an explanation—not even Rabbi Eliezar, for he died on the way home from the feast of the Covenant.

The day following Ephraim's initiation was fixed for the Dedication of the Scroll; and in honor of this a general holiday prevailed through the town. Tarphon himself carried the scroll from his house to the synagogue in procession with the wardens and goodmen of the congregation. The House of Prayer was

packed every inch, and from the galleries the women threw down cakes and sweetmeats, and there was great merriment and amicable strife in the catching of the dainties. But Tarphon's munificence was not yet at an end. In the opening paragraphs of Genesis, where the letters were only outlined, he chose the characters that made up the name of his son, "Ephraim ben Tarphon," to be filled in with ink; and the same he did with the last sentences of Deuteronomy, which had been left blank likewise. And for every letter he paid five roubles, all which went to the community to be given in charity to those that needed. Nor yet were the festivities done with, for on the thirtieth day from the birth took place Ephraim's redemption. And this means that he was repurchased from the priests of the town; for, being a "first-born," he was, according to the Law, the due and tithe of the Cohanim, the descendants of Aaron. And Tarphon paid to every priest who asked for it the sum of ninety copecks, and again there was a plentiful feast provided. Occasionally Tarphon reflected on the strange blessing Rabbi Eliezar had uttered over Ephraim, but, though he knew a little more of the case, he saw therein no clearer significance than did the others; but it seemed to imply that an extraordinary destiny hung over his son that might turn to good or ill. Yet from the first Ephraim proved a source of joy. At the age of two he could say the alphabet from Aleph to Tov, and from Tov back to Aleph; and at three he boldly tackled the sesquipedalian monsters that are to be found in the "Sayings of the Fathers."

About this time Ephraim's career, which augured

so well, almost came to an abrupt ending, and the thing was due to the carelessness of some one. For Mirzah had occasion to go upon some household errand, and had left the boy sleeping upon the couch, for the servants were about, and she knew he was safe. Now as to demons, burglars, and ravenous beasts he was certainly safe, for there were none in the neighborhood. But in the very room where he slept there stood a monster made of glazed bricks that reached to the ceiling, and its inners were filled with burning embers. Now, this monster-oven found that the flue through which it was wont to respire had become choked up, and the fumes which were to escape into the open were forced back into the cavity; and to obtain relief from the overcharge, the oven began to belch forth the noisome exhalations into the chamber, so that all the pure air became forced out through the crevices. And with the pain of the oppression, Ephraim awoke and started to scream with all the strength that yet remained in his poor tormented chest; and at that moment Mirzah rushed in, and snatched him out of his peril just two heart-beats before it was too late. All the week he was sick and giddy, so that he was prevented from going to synagogue on the Sabbath with his father. And that was a sore disappointment to the little fellow. For he was now entrusted with the rolling-up of the swathe that served as a girdle for his scroll; and he was never happier than when at this task, although the stiff silken border proved a difficult matter for his little fingers. And that Sabbath there happened a strange thing in the synagogue. For while Naphtali, the

master of the Cantillation, was reciting the weekly portion of the Law, he was seen suddenly to stop, and take off his spectacles; and then he rubbed his eyes and looked again. But though he rubbed spots out of his eyes, he could not rub the mistake from the page; for, to be sure, the word for "breath," which ought to have been in the passage he had come up to, was missing from its place, and the sentence ran on mutilated and incoherent. And the wonder was how the deficiency had escaped notice so long, though at each reading the page had been closely scanned by three pairs of eyes—namely, those of Naphtali, who read, of the person who was called up to pronounce the blessing over the section, and of Tarphon, who stood pointing. The next day Benish was summoned, and great was his consternation at the mishap.

"I don't know how this came about," he said in justification. "Every line I went over diligently after I had written it, and not even the tail of a Yod but was marked with unerring accuracy—but of this I can make nothing."

And then with dubious shakings of head he corrected the omission, and every one admired the skill wherewith he superliterated the erasure so that no trace of the tinkering remained. Tarphon was greatly grieved at the occurrence, for it jeopardized the reputation of the scroll. Still his grief was more than counterbalanced by the joy of Ephraim's speedy recovery.

And as time went on, Ephraim continued to make progress, so that at the age of seven he had already advanced to the study of Rashi and Onkelos and the

commentators, and harassed his teachers with perplexing questions.

"Tell me," he once asked them, "if it happen that a man has searched every nook and corner of his abode upon the eve preceding the Passover, and has gathered all the crumbs and particles of leaven, so that nothing is left; but if during the festival a mouse should bring in from the adjoining dwelling, which is a Gentile's, a crust of bread and deposit it secretly in the Jewish house, is the owner thereof liable to the punishment of him who neglects the ordinance: 'Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses'?" And this, you must admit, is not a question which can be answered standing on one leg; and it was whispered that before every lesson his teachers held a conclave to be prepared with satisfactory answers to the precocious questioner. And Tarphon held his head high among the fathers of the congregation.

But little Ephraim was no mere bookworm; he romped about with the other children, and excelled in their games. And thus it happened that a serious accident befell him. For, one day, while playing at hare and hounds, he was chosen the hare; and seeing that one of his playmates had nearly come up to him, he looked about for a place of refuge or vantage. Now, in the corner of the courtyard where he had taken his flight, there stood a large four-walled tank, rising to the height of three feet from the ground, which contained, as Ephraim thought in his perilous haste, dry fodder for the cattle; and if he could but attain that he was safe, for from there he could clamber over into the next courtyard, and his pursuer could not equal

him in leaping. And at last he reached the side, and vaulting over—splash—!—down he went, for the tank was full of water, and sprinkled only at the top with a thin layer of chaff; and once he sank, and twice, and then at the third time a stableman rushed to the spot, and barely reached him at the end of a pitchfork that caught in Ephraim's doublet. And so he was borne home, a pitiable sight, his limbs stiff and his eyes staring wide; for the water he had swallowed had almost forced the life from his body. And when Mirzah saw him thus, she set up a loud wailing, but Tarphon only turned pale, and helped her quickly to strip him and put him into warm coverlets. By the Sabbath Ephraim had somewhat recovered, though he still remained a little ailing; and Tarphon went to synagogue to offer up thanksgiving for the sparing of his child. And the portion of the week was the crossing of the Red Sea; and when Naphtali had come to the passage where the waters parted, Tarphon suddenly clutched hold of his hand and bade him stop; for Tarphon's eyes had caught an error so glaring that Naphtali might be pardoned for passing it without notice in the belief that his senses were playing him false. For the word "mayim," signifying "waters," was written such that the final "mem" bore the same shape as the initial "mem"; and the whole congregation came up, one by one, to examine the monstrosity of the thing, and certain remarks concerning Benish went from mouth to mouth that would not have pleased him. What? Take such a treasury of money for work which a cobbler's boy would have performed more creditably? Such a thing had not been heard

of ever since geese grew quills to make pens for scribes. And when Benish was called to see with his own eyes, he stood tapping his forehead for a long time.

"Nay, my masters," he said at last, "this is not my handiwork. I am not a son of the soil, and I did not write this scroll in my sleep; but there is a mystery in this, I swear that upon the scroll. There is an evil spirit lurking in the place; perhaps the man who blew the ram's horn on the First Day of the Year was unworthy of his office or incapable thereof, for he did not frighten the Satan away by the strength and excellence of his blowing, and that is the cause of this mischief." Many there were who believed the explanation, and many there were who did not; and of the latter the most incredulous was Naphtali, for he himself was the man who had blown the ram's horn. And then Benish made the correction, and went away; and when Tarphon came home he found Ephraim eating chicken-broth, and the flush of health had come back to his cheeks.

Ephraim continued to make good headway in all things. At the age of ten he began to keep all the fast-days, observing even the "Fast of the First-born" until the time of sunset; and he missed not a single service either in the early morning or in the evening of each day, and when his father was kept away by business, he went by himself. And in all things relating to his religion he was most circumspect, and if the white of an egg showed but a tiny speck of blood he would not eat it, even though another were not immediately available. And yet for all this he did

not seem to be spared trial and calamity. It was at the time of counting the Omer, the seven weeks that elapse between Passover and Pentecost, when Ephraim had reached the age of eleven, that he went with the other children of the town to the river's bank, there to gather the youngling bulrushes, which it is customary at this season of the year to strew across the floor, so that a pleasant savor might rise up from the sap. And Ephraim, in his eagerness to pluck only of the best, had strayed from his comrades, and did not notice how the soil was getting more and more porous, and squelched beneath his footsteps. And suddenly it slipped away from him altogether, and there he was up to his waist in the slimy ooze; and, more by instinct than premeditation, he flung his arms aloft, and grasped at the branches of the willow-tree that overhung his head, and that saved him. But it seemed to him that for the moment his arm must have lengthened to three times its usual measure, even as the arm of Pharaoh's daughter lengthened so that she might pull Moses from the water; for Ephraim could not understand how else he had reached the supports to which he clung. And there he might have remained during the night, had it not been for the poor washerwoman who plied her task a little further up; and when she had helped him out, Ephraim enjoined her, giving her all his stock of savings, not to speak of his misadventure. And then he went home, very frightened, and changed his clothes before his parents might ask questions as to their condition. But what washerwoman ever recognized that she had a tongue to keep secrets with? And the tale of his son's escape

soon reached Tarphon's ears, and at the news a thought flashed across his mind, undefined and vague, and he tried to connect its trail by dim links of memory with something else equally vague and undefined; but the more he followed it, the more subtly it escaped him. And again he renewed the attempt, when it came about during the next reading of the Law, which took place on the second Sabbath of the Omer, that there was yet another alteration necessary in the scroll. For in the passage where it speaks of the houses of the lepers and of the mortar connected therewith, the word for mortar, which is "ongphar," and properly signifies "loam," or earth, was slightly shifted from its place, so that it stood slantingly below the level of the line. Now this was the eleventh time in eleven years that Tarphon had scanned the place, and never before had he remarked its peculiarity; and he knew it was of no use to send for Benish to account for the thing, so on the day following he came, and, without a word to any one, made the correction himself. But the event lay deeply in his mind, and he did not forget it for many a day.

At last came the time when Ephraim was to become a Son of the Commandments, and Tarphon determined that the occasion should be celebrated with befitting splendor. Of course, Ephraim read before the congregation the whole portion of the week, and, in addition, the chapter from the Prophets pertaining thereto; and that was a feat of which not everybody's son could boast. Not only that, but he delivered an oration of his own making, showing that he felt the responsibility of becoming a full-fledged member of the congregation;

and the whole town was full of his praises, and Tarphon was vaunted, indeed, a man whose works turned out well. A month after, Ephraim was to proceed to the great Talmud School of Vilosen, for he was to qualify for a Rabbi; but on the eve of his departure he complained of spots before his eyes, and there was a slight discoloration about his temples, which became more and more apparent. This was his first serious illness, and Tarphon went betimes to change the boy's name, so that if it had been ordained—was not God's wisdom infinite?—that the Angel of Death should be deputed to lay his hand on him, Azrael might come and find some one who answered not to the name of him for whom he had been sent on the errand. But despite of it Ephraim grew worse; a fever came over him, and the blood coursed seething-hot through his veins. Tarphon and Mirzah sat and looked at him, noting every breath he drew and every tremor of his body. And when Mirzah had fallen asleep with the weariness of the watching, Tarphon buried his head in his hands; but he did not weep—there was no time for that. He was busy tracing the flimsy thread of memory that he knew lurked somewhere in the recesses of his mind. And all at once a quaint phrase leapt forth therefrom, and he grew puzzled where he had heard it. "The four things that are His dimensions." That was something to work upon, and then came another recollection, which ran, "If the twin-soul pass all the trials thereof, then shall it live appointed days." Were not those the words which Rabbi Eliezar had uttered at Ephraim's initiation into the Covenant? And then Tarphon carefully pieced together his con-

jectures. In the week that Ephraim had nearly suffered death from the poisonous vapors, was there not missing from its place in the Scriptures the word "ruach," signifying the air, the clean breath of the nostrils? And then again, at the time when Ephraim was nearly drowned in the cattle tank, was not the word for "waters" found to be ill-conditioned—the end letter the same as the beginning, even as Ephraim had thought that the bottom of the tank was of like nature to the top? And Tarphon thought tremblingly of the last point: when Ephraim had gone to gather bulrushes, was there not an untoward dislocation of the word that means "earth," even as the ground had moved from its place under his feet? And so Ephraim had run the gauntlet of air, water, and earth, and in each case the scroll had suffered mishandling in the words of this meaning. And now it was clear to Tarphon that the "four dimensions of God" were, forsooth, the four elements, and the "twin-soul" was the spirit animating both his child and the scroll that had been born into life at one and the same moment. And what further proof did he need? Was not the boy writhing with the inflammation of his vitals? Was he not burning as with a fire? That was it—and Tarphon leapt up like a madman—there was some word signifying fire, flame, or burning that needed correction in the scroll, and if that were done, the danger would be passed, and the elements conquered, and his boy Ephraim would live long days, and be a king among men. And so Tarphon stormed out through the door—he would search the scroll from beginning to end, even if the sight of his

eyes perished over it. But suddenly he stopped—it was very strange: surely the sun had long gone down, and it was too early for the dawn; but over there to the west was a reddish glare that increased as he went on, and round the corner men came running, breathlessly shouting:

"Tarphon, Tarphon, the synagogue is in flames!"

And Tarphon dashed on with wolf-like eyes and gnashing teeth, and when he came up to the crowd that stood outside the burning edifice, he clove through it as a thunderbolt cleaves through ears of corn, shrieking: "The scroll, the scroll; or else he dies—he dies!" And before they could hold him, he had rushed into the flaming chaos of destruction, torn down the aisle to the Sacred Ark, which spat sheaves of fire at him—and lo, there was the scroll blazing like touchwood. But what of that? There was the scroll—in cinders or not, what mattered it? And out again he came, like a demon who has burst his chains, from amid the holocaust of his damnation. And on and on he ran, holding the charred trophy above his head—and when he came in, they had just finished stretching the linen sheet over the starkening limbs, and were turning the looking-glasses towards the wall.

Two days afterwards was the Fast of Ab, the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem, the day whereon are carried to the "Good Place" for burial all the torn leaflets and spoilt synagogue gear whereon appears the name of God; but the Scroll of Tarphon was buried in one and the same coffin with his son Ephraim. Say, are not these things wonderful?

THE SUNKEN KINGDOM

WHENEVER he came into the village there was a panic among the children. "Black Anton is here," ran the cry, and in a moment the streets were swept, and the romping, vociferous crew, which just now had been scaring back the twilight shadows, stampeded breathlessly to shelter, and then stood peeping out through the holes in the shutters, to watch the apparition go by. This was the third generation of little villagers to whom the said Black Anton had acted as bogey, and the grandfathers fell into fits of musing as he passed, because it was as though they saw the memory of their youth stalking by visibly, and the world seemed hardly to have grown older; here was Black Anton still coming month by month, bringing his salves and ointments and nostrums, the same that had physicked them through their infant tribulations, and now did the same office for their children's children. Only the epithet to his name was an anachronism, because his hair and beard, jet black as they remembered it, was now as bleached as theirs.

There was no apparent reason for the fear Black Anton inspired; it was merely a survival. The little folks grew out of it as they grew out of their short frocks and knickerbockers; and then they got so busy fighting the real terrors of life that they had no time to hark back to those of their childhood. For all that, it was on record that no inhabitant of the village,

unless he could reach the Mezuzzah,* if only by standing on tiptoe, had ever had speech with Black Anton, or had ventured to stand within ten yards of him. But that was before the coming of Abner, who, when his parents died, was sent to live with his uncle Baruch, the rope-maker.

"Did you have a bogey in your village?" was the first question his new acquaintances at Turok asked him.

"No," answered Abner, looking puzzled.

"Well, we have," boasted the natives.

The boast rankled in Abner's mind; it implied a slur on the completeness of the organizations in his birthplace.

"Are you very much frightened of him?" he asked, with a sudden thought.

"Awfully," replied the natives with much pride and solemnity, "he is quite terrible."

"What does he do, for instance?" continued Abner, sceptically.

"Ah, well, you see, he makes you run away."

"Is that all? Then I don't believe he is so much of a bogey as you think him. He won't make me run away."

For answer he reaped a rich harvest of incredulous smiles.

"Where is he?" queried Abner, with the air of a lion asking for his prey.

"He does not live in the village; but he comes here the second week in every month—that will be next week."

*Door-post amulet.

"All right; I shall be ready for him," said Abner, and nonchalantly turned on his heel.

In the days that elapsed before Anton's monthly visit, Abner was the central object of interest to all the little boys within a radius of two miles. Some ridiculed him, some said he was mad, but all were of opinion that something terrible was sure to befall him. It would serve him right for his presumption; he had no business, stranger that he was, to lay a sacrilegious hand on the traditions of the place. And so the outcome of the adventure was looked forward to on tiptoe of expectation.

It was towards the end of the second week when two scouts brought the news of Black Anton's arrival; he had been seen hobbling across the market-place.

"You had better wait for him here—he will pass by presently," Abner heard some one say. "Now you will see whether he is a real bogey or not."

The next instant he found himself alone, but he looked at the neighboring windows and saw many eyes watching his movements. A great feeling of loneliness came over him, a sudden fear that he had not weighed well the full import of his undertaking, and he whispered to himself:

"Father told me there are no demons in the world, except the Evil Desire that is inborn in man."

With that he regained some of his composure, and sat down on a doorstep and looked to the top of the street, where Anton was to appear. Five, ten minutes passed, and Abner began to think, not, perhaps, without a suspicion of satisfaction, that Anton had changed his route, or that the whole thing was only a hoax,

when he saw something turn the corner, something that was small and bent, with a cataract of white hair about its shoulders, and dressed in a coat of raw sheepskin, which trailed on the ground. Slowly it walked on, and when it came abreast of him Abner stepped up, with a curious tremor about his limbs, and his eyes half-shut.

"Black Anton, I am not afraid of you, Black Anton," he said.

If he had had his eyes open, he would have seen that it devolved more on Anton to disclaim fear, for he tottered back a pace or two, and his breath came very fast, but that might have been with old age.

"Why should you be afraid of me, little boy?" he asked.

"Because all the others are."

"Yes, that is true," replied Anton, and Abner could have sworn he heard a sob.

"And you are really not afraid of me, little boy?" asked Anton again.

"No, I am certain."

"Then come to my hut, beyond the mill-dyke, you know; come to-morrow, will you, little boy?"

Abner thought he could not trust his ears, and so he took courage and cast a look at the face before him —a thin, wizened little face, sharply curved, with great angles at the jaws, and the stamp of ineffable age imprinted upon it. And then he got to the eyes, and gave a start of wonder, because they were so much out of keeping with what he had just seen; they looked so hale and fresh and bright, as though the morning dew of youth had lain upon them but yesterday, and in

them he saw a voice that repeated the old man's prayer more clearly than his lips had done.

"Why should I come to you at your hut?" he asked.

"Because you are not afraid of me, little boy," came the answer like the refrain of a song.

Abner reflected. "I shall come if I can," he said at length.

Anton hung his head; then he lifted it suddenly, and his gaze flashed on Abner's with a wonderful light that held it captive.

"I shall come," said Abner, speaking like one in a dream.

"Good little boy! good little boy!" muttered Anton. He opened his mouth to say more, but checked himself with a gasp, and passed on down the street, while Abner looked after the trailing sheep-skin, and marked its wake over the dusty street stones as if he had never seen such a thing in his life. Then he turned to go, all oblivious of the skulkers behind the windows, when suddenly they came trooping out and surrounded him, holding him back with eager little hands, and deafening his ears with their loud-voiced curiosity.

"What did he say? What were you talking about? Strip, and see if he has left the mark of the evil eye on you anywhere."

Roughly Abner elbowed his way through the crowd. When he had cleared it, he stopped a moment, eying them in contempt.

"You want to know what he said? He said, 'One fool may throw a stone into a heap of rubbish, and a hundred wise men will look for it in vain.'"

It was early next afternoon that Abner wended his

way to the mill-dyke. Anton stood at the door of his hut, as if he were looking for some one.

"Good little boy! good little boy!" he said, stretching out his thin, shrivelled hand and drawing his visitor into the hut. "Sit here—no, here; the skins will be softer, and the sun cannot get at you, good little boy!" and he bustled about so nimbly that Abner could not believe that this was the foot-sore grey-beard of yesterday. "So your name is Abner?" he went on. "'Father of light,' it means. Ah! I know your tongue, though I am not of your faith and race. A great light shall be born of you, little boy, I prophesy."

Abner said nothing, and only listened with all his ears.

"You are silent; you are amazed at my ramblings?" said Anton, with an anxious smile. "Indeed, I know what I am saying; but only those who have lived in the wilderness can feel what joy it is to hear one's tongue shaping words and utterance in another's hearing; but I shall be silent, if you prefer it, only do not go away, not just yet."

"What are you doing here, in the wilderness?" asked Abner. "Why do you not live in the towns, amidst people, where there is plenty of talk going on?"

"Is it there less lonely than in the desert? Noise is not company; in truth, where many lips speak, the heart is oftenest silent."

"But why are you here? You did not grow on a tree, as the saying is," insisted Abner.

"I have known the world," smiled Anton, evading the question, "but I have forgotten it—you cannot

forget a thing unless you have known it, can you, Abner?"

And, while Abner was still pondering what reply to make to his strange questioner, he felt him take his hand and lead him to the window.

"Do you see that pond over there?" Anton was saying. "I stood by that pond when the timber of the mill-wheels which its waters drive was yet young undergrowth in the forest. And what do you think I did, Abner? I drowned a whole world there."

"It hardly looks large enough for it," said Abner, dubiously.

"Ah, but a man's world is not so large as one of God's," went on Anton, very seriously, "and yet mine was a fair size. It was a young man's world, you see, and I had made it into a kingdom, with capitals and palaces and sanctuaries. And then something came that threatened to lay my capitals waste, my minarets were tottering, and my palaces were becoming owls'-nests; and, therefore, rather than my eyes should be saddened by the ruin, I came here and buried it, while it was still stately and splendid. And thus I have a noble memory to feast my soul on. Was it not wise of me, little Abner?"

"Perhaps it would have been wiser if the king had straightway followed his kingdom," said Abner, not because he understood exactly what the old man meant, but because he was evidently expected to say something.

"Yes, that would have been wiser," said Anton, stroking the little head; "but I was very ignorant in those days." And then it came out like the rush of a

whirlwind: "Shall we be friends, little Abner? Now just look at me very carefully, and see if there is anything in me to make you desire my friendship."

Abner did as he was bidden, and knew at once what answer to give; he saw now why the look in the man's eyes was so solemn and splendid—it was the reflection of his sunken kingdom. And therefore he said nothing, and only held out both his hands.

"You think, perhaps, I am a poor man," hurried on Anton, seizing them as if he would never again let them go; "but you are mistaken. I have much gold to give you—a treasure of millions. I know where it is hidden, and if I live long enough, we shall dig for it deeply. Only you must come again—tomorrow, and the day after, and every day."

"I shall come—not for the millions, but for you," said Abner.

"Look here," said Anton, quickly drawing aside a curtain that partitioned the hut at the farther end, "these are the mines. Are they not worth coming for?"

Abner scanned in amazement the stately array of books that ran, row on row, along the wall on rudely-hewn ledges. He had seen many books—quite twenty—in his father's house; his father had been a great scholar, and would have made one of Abner. And if one could gather so much knowledge from only a score of volumes, how much more from these many hundreds!

"Are they not good to look at?" asked Anton, noting his spell-bound gaze. "And how they talk! The pity is only they are all soul and no body, and

it feels good at times to be able to touch with one's hands as well as with one's mind. Stand close to me, Abner."

It was not till near sunset that Abner left the hut.

"Do you see that?" said Anton, at the door, pointing to the glowing west. "This is the hour at which the day seems either most gladsome or dreariest; for it is the time to take the measure of its import, and judge its worth and value. If we have spent it well, that rosy hue is the emblem of hope and solace; but if we have done otherwise, it shall be the flaming red which is the badge of guilt and shame. Abner, when you rise at morn, let your first thoughts be of the evening. Life is but a day."

And Abner hurried home through the gathering shadows, and the eyes which he knew were following him from the hut seemed to cast a light before him all along his path. But when he came to the pond he stopped for a while and looked in. Quite right; at the bottom of it there were the palaces and temples, with red banners waving over them in triumph.

Abner kept his promise faithfully. Day by day he visited the hut, and each time the bonds of companionship twined closer round the old man and the lad. At first nobody took much notice of their intercourse, because Abner was too small a thing to trouble about. It was only when the increase of inches in his stature became more apparent, and his uncle began to think him available for practical purposes, that the matter came up for discussion.

"Where is he all day?" asked Baruch. "I believe he goes to the Gentile, the ointment-mixer."

"Because you wake up at midday you think it is only just dawn," said Fryda, his wife. "I have been sure of it for a long time."

"How did you find out?"

"I asked the boy, and he told me."

"Well, then, this shall be the end of it," said Baruch; "to-morrow he starts with me in my rope-walk."

"Nothing of the sort," said Fryda; "he is too good for hemp."

"Then what would you have him be—a Gentile?"

"There is no fear of that; I have watched him keenly—he has not departed from the ordinances of our faith, no, not by a nail's breadth. There is no harm in the Gentile; he is good and wise, and his cure for the colic is excellent. Rather let Abner learn the making of medicines and the preparation of salves, which we can afterwards sell at a great profit."

"And the poor shall have them for nothing!" interposed Baruch.

"Selfish to the core you are, Baruch, my husband," said Fryda, in annoyance, "to snatch away from me the merit of a pious resolve—was it not on the tip of my tongue? Yes, Baruch, as I was saying, the poor shall have them for nothing."

And so Abner was relieved of a great fear, the fear that he would be put to a trade and his opportunities of associating with Anton restricted. But when instead he found them facilitated, and knew he could give his heart's desire full rein without danger of having to curb it in mid-career, then he did marvellous things. Already Anton had given him much knowl-

edge; the books on the wall were beginning to talk to him in their strange languages, softly and falteringly, it is true, but he was getting to understand them. Now, however, that it was no forbidden thing, his passion seized him with a giant grasp and hurried him on irresistibly.

"More, more Anton," he would cry; "why are you so niggardly? All that you give me has been but for one tooth, and I have so many teeth."

And Anton stood by, almost terrified by the ravenous greed he had created, and thanked God that in his own store of provision there was sufficient to satiate it.

So the years passed on in summers and winters. And at last there came a summer when Anton knew he would not hear the reapers' harvest song, because another reaper would forestall them.

"We shall not work to-day," he said when Abner came one afternoon; "we shall go out and listen to the sunshine."

Abner helped him out to the little hillock, which was Anton's favorite basking-place, because from there he could see over to the pond.

"I feel so young to-day, little Abner," he said, looking up at the sturdy young figure that towered over him, "I could almost start fashioning myself another kingdom."

"I have fashioned one for you," said Abner, quietly —"in song," he went on in answer to Anton's questioning look, "a song of sovereignty it is. Would you care to hear it?"

Anton nodded, and Abner took out of his pocket a

written sheet, and read from it the tale of a man who, if he had chosen, might have been a king over his fellows; only he thought there was no stability or endurance in such dominion, and, therefore, he resigned his sway, and dwelt in the wilderness, alone, the monarch of his solitude. But one day there came a little child, and in its bosom he founded a mighty realm, that stood fast in its foundations, wherein he ruled as ruler absolute; and beneath his sceptre the kingdom widened, until it embraced a whole world, in which there was but one lord and one vassal. And so the song went on, while the sunbeams danced on the singer's face, and the listener's head drooped lower and lower. And when the last great surge of melody had ebbed away, Anton looked up and said:

"Who taught you that, little boy?"

"So you are human, after all?" laughed Abner, with a happy laugh. "Human, with the besetting sin of mankind, which is vanity. You would have me utter your name aloud, shout it to the skies, blazon it abroad to the ends of the earth? Then, listen: 'Anton, Black Anton it was that taught me the golden glory of the sunrise, the majesty of noon, the grandeur of the darkness—taught me the magic of the seasons, the mysteries of life and death.'"

And then suddenly he knelt down, and put his arm round the stooping shoulders, and whispered:

"For a long time I have been hearing a voice in my heart, struggling for utterance with the cadences of music wherein the song of the lark, the laugh of the flowers, and the cry of the tempest were all blended. But I refrained from speaking with that voice till

it should be able to give forth something that was worth the hearing, for I had sworn to myself that your name should be its first theme. Tell me, master, have I done well?"

"You have done exceedingly well—better than the theme deserves, or its inspiration might warrant. What I have done for you is such a little, little thing compared to the debt I owe you."

Abner almost sprang back in his astonishment.

"The debt you owe me?" he echoed. "You who have made me rich with a treasure of millions, with uncountable, imperishable wealth—you speak of owing me? Anton, you have always deemed me worthy of your truth; do not humiliate me thus."

Anton struggled to his feet, and his face shone.

"When I went through the villages," he said, "and saw the little ones fly from me as from a pestilence or a wild beast let loose, I used to ask myself: 'Anton, why has this reproach been put upon you? Why have you been set aside from the rest of men to be an outcast from the places of purity and innocence—the hearts of the children? Surely, there is something imperfect in you, something lacking; perhaps God has forgotten to give you a soul, and the children have discovered it.' Then you came and stood before me and said, 'Anton, I am not afraid,' and then I knew I possessed all the attributes, God-born and earth-born, which man should possess. My reproach was taken from me, and when I enter the gates of death, the Recording Angel can no longer say: 'Here comes the man of whom the children were afraid.' I am no longer ashamed to die—that is the debt I owe you,

Abner. And now come, it is getting chill, and the sunset is near, very near."

The next morning when Abner came to the hut, he found the old man stretched on his couch, still and stately; but in the glazed eyes could be read a proclamation of victory, and from his rigid lips one could almost hear and see the pæan of triumph ascending: his reproach had been taken from him.

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Years afterwards a fine gentleman and a beautiful lady were standing in the little Christian cemetery, near Turok, before a magnificent tomb of marble, coped high by a golden dome.

"I could not do less for him," the gentleman was saying; "it was but the poorest way of honoring the memory of a king. And now that you have seen his grave, come and I shall show you where his kingdom is sepulchred."

And presently they stood before the brimming pond, which drove the lazy mill-wheels as of old, and looked into its depths.

"Do you not see the cupolas and the buttresses, with the crimson banners streaming aloft?" he asked.

The lady looked and saw them distinctly, because she saw everything through his eyes.

"What his story was?" he asked, in answer to her question. He took her hand in his and went on dreamily, "I don't know, Rachel; he never told me. But, if I may guess, woe to the kingdom whose king has not won the queen with whom he would share his throne."

TOWARDS THE SUNRISE

After bestowing both his parents in the grave, and his only sister in marriage, Judah Engelsohn was free to do as he pleased. The income he derived from the dairy-farm he had inherited from his father, late factor to Count Gribalski, the great land-owner, provided him with comfortable, if not over-affluent, means of subsistence. And so he said good-bye to the four-footed ruminators who, together with their predecessors, had engorged the first twenty-three years of his life, and came to Warsaw.

There was a special reason why he chose the Polish capital for his place of abode. Into his boyhood's hermitage there had come from time to time vague echoes, faint after-quivers of the great upheaval that was stirring his people, dazed with suffering, out of their millennial torpor. By-and-by these rumors had changed into tidings of certainty. His soul caught fire: he longed to be present at the awakening, to add his shout to those that were bidding the sleeper arise and array himself once more in the glory of which he had been stripped by the despoiling centuries. And Judah felt it would be base and criminal to remain longer where he was, thrust away out of sight of, out of touch with his fellows in faith, in the solitude where one remembered only by a miracle, or at best by an accident, that one belonged to a great race and a great destiny.

Judah had no acquaintances in Warsaw; he brought, however, a letter of introduction to Uriah Vilenski, the doyen of the Jewish Students' Association. On the second day after his arrival Judah called on Vilenski.

"So you have come here because you want to help Zion?" asked the latter, after the usual preliminaries of identification, looking curiously at his visitor. "What can you do?"

"I don't know yet," replied Judah. "How can I tell when I am ignorant of what there remains to be done?"

"Everything," said Vilenski; "we have got as far as the beginning. We want men to help us farther. I don't know, you might be one of them. Have you learnt anything? You speak Russian remarkably well."

"The tutor of the young counts gave me three hours a week," said Judah, simply. "I can read Cicero; I have a fair knowledge of French and German and a tolerable notion of the questions of the day. These are my accomplishments. I have but one natural talent—my love for Zion."

"That is always welcome, even reckoned as an acquirement," broke in Vilenski. "And that is where your work should lie. You should utilize your talent, and impart it to others."

Judah looked up quickly. "I do not ask for anything better. I could not ask for anything easier. Nothing could be easier in this great city where every third man I meet is linked to me by the memory of Jerusalem's ruins. I shall make them listen to me. I shall go to them one after another, and say—"

"A sort of roving commission," interrupted Vilenski, smilingly. "No, friend, we are more methodical than that. Listen, there are about a dozen of us. We call ourselves the Kadima. We have forsworn the seeking of wealth and earthly honors, and all who would be of us must do the same. We are pledged to Zion body and soul. While our pulses are capable of a throb, while our minds can fashion a thought, we shall toil in her service. She needs many such toilers, many such servitors. I think you would be a valuable recruit. Will you join us?"

Judah gazed silently at the floor. "Kadima," he said at last, half to himself, "that means eastward, towards the Sunrise. Yes, that is whither we should be tending—thither, where our new day is breaking, where the shadows will be afraid to follow us. It will be sweet to have a little sunshine again; we have shivered long enough with the cold. And then you ask me, if I would be one of those to lead the way? I beg it of you as a privilege. Eastward—aye, ever eastward!"

And so it came that Judah joined the Kadima; but no, he did not—the Kadima joined him. He had been a little unjust to his natal star in the enumeration of his natural gifts. The discovery surprised him as much as the others. At the first meeting of the Kadima that he attended, he had risen to his feet to offer some trivial suggestion. He had thought that a few well-turned sentences would be enough to give it expression, but a quarter of an hour afterwards he was still standing up, still speaking, for to save his life he could not check the flood of eloquence that came

surging up from his heart's depths, taking to itself, with every second breath, fresh scope and volume, widening out into majestic eddies of sweeping argument, and anon contracting itself into whirlpools of passionate fervor. He was unconscious of his gape-mouthed audience; he was not addressing them; he was speaking to himself. These were the culminations of his night vigils, the thoughts and feelings his heart had accumulated these many years, cramping them up, hoarding them jealously, till there was no more storage-room. And, therefore, he spoke, because his words were to him as the air of heaven to a choking man.

When he sat down there was a momentous silence, followed by a short whispered consultation among the members, and presently Vilenski came up to him.

"We cannot let you work with us," he said.

"Why—why not?" queried Judah, taken aback.

"You are too good for us—too strong for us, and, therefore, if we are to act in concert, let us work with you. You are a stranger in our midst—a mere probationer; and already you have shown that you can do in minutes what we could not do in years. We have men amongst us who have given up the marrow of their youth, the sinews of their manhood in our mission—none more so than I. But we must stand aside. If this work is to be achieved, the lesser of us must make way for the greater ungrudgingly, without murmur or complaint. Only the best shall hold command. Be our general; let us follow under your banner."

That was how the Kadima joined Judah. Nor was it long before his fame had trickled out beyond its

narrow confines. Whenever he was seen, on the Nalevkas, in the street of the Franciscans, or anywhere within the purlieus where the teeming thousands of his coreligionists congregated, men gazed and pointed after him: "There goes Judah Engelsohn." And any one who noted the massive, lion-like head with the broad thinker's forehead and the fearless eyes—who watched the towering frame striding erect and resolute through their midst as though nothing could deflect it from its path or purpose—added to himself: "Yes, I thought he would look like that."

Some six months afterwards Judah had occasion to call on Vilenski, to consult with him on business connected with their Association. His friend was out, but was expected back shortly. Judah decided to await his return. Vilenski's room was on the second floor, and overlooked the court formed by the four blocks of buildings that flanked its sides. Judah sat down by the window, and gazed out vacantly. The square was deserted; the men—artisans most of them—had gone to their work; the women were cooking; the children were in school. Suddenly Judah heard the front-gate shut with a clang, and a moment after Ivan, the red-headed concierge, came staggering into the middle of the court. Judah saw at a glance that the man had drunk heavily, but he did not know what had brought the cunning, murderous look into his eyes, or what he concealed so sedulously under his jacket. The fact was that this happened to be Ivan's saint's-day, and, as usual, he observed it by drinking himself into *delirium tremens*. Now, even in his most rational and charitable moments, Ivan could not for-

give his wife for not being some one else's wife; and when in his present condition, he always did his best to rectify her mistake by making himself a widower. He was sure she was in hiding somewhere about the adjoining premises, and now he was standing sentry here, waiting for her to appear down one of the staircases. The tenants were not much concerned; they knew that Ivan's wife had gone to fetch the police, and that in five minutes the danger would be over.

Judah watched the man attentively; there was food for reflection in the spectacle. Whatever reproach their detractors might hurl against his brothers, their malice could not go so far as this. They could not taunt them with effacing from their countenances, as this brute had done, the image of the God who made them. There might be a few—ah! but it was these few that saved the many. Judah bent forward: the drunkard was standing on the alert—some one was descending. Yes, a young girl stepped out, veiled and richly dressed; evidently she did not belong to any of the tenant families. For a moment she stood wondering at the strange sight that met her gaze. Ivan began to stumble towards her; he had heard the rustle of skirts, and that was enough to convince him he had his wife to deal with. Then, as the girl realized her danger, she screamed, and darted past him to gain the gateway. A glance showed her it was closed, and there would not be enough time to undo the bars. She turned round, but by now the ruffian had intercepted her way back into the court-square. To the left of her was a little door. Judah just gave himself time to see her disappear behind it, when he rushed down,

five steps at a time. Ivan's hand had moved under his doublet, and there had been a glitter of steel. Judah knew that the door led to a bricked-up flight of stairs, at the top of which the girl would be caught in an impasse; he himself had blundered into it at his first visit. He reached it just as Ivan's foot was on the threshold, hauled him back by the collar, jerked the knife from his nerveless grasp, and sent him spinning into a convenient puddle. It was all the work of a moment.

"You can come down now," called Judah, "there is no danger."

She appeared almost immediately; her face showed very white under her veil, but otherwise her demeanor was calm. She cast a shuddering glance at Ivan, who had sat up, propped on his elbow and whimpering piteously.

"Thank you," she said quietly, as she saw Judah forcing back the heavy bolts of the gate; and Judah did not know whether she thanked him for saving her life, or only for procuring her egress. He took it to mean both.

"May I escort you home?" he asked diffidently. "You are probably a little shaken by this unpleasant incident."

"Yes, do come," she said cordially; "my father will naturally want to acknowledge his obligation to you. He would scold me, did I not bring you."

Judah hailed a fiacre, his companion gave an address, and Judah wondered not a little as he heard it. Indeed, he wondered so much that he thought his ears had deceived him. It was a long drive, and for the

most part a silent one; but Judah found enough pastime in studying her face. It was a pleasant study. And then he started to wonder afresh as the vehicle pulled up outside a huge mansion in the Praga suburb. He knew to whom it belonged. So he had not made a mistake. It was, indeed, the daughter of Heinrich Kronemann, the great banker, the greatest Jew in Warsaw, whom he had saved from a terrible fate!

A minute or two after he was sitting in a magnificent saloon; he waited a little, and then the door opened for the banker and his daughter.

"So you are the hero," said the former, striving to be jocular; but the trembling in his voice and the moisture in his eyes belied the attempt. "I have many millions of roubles—I can't help people knowing the fact," he continued, "but I have only one child. How can I repay you?"

"By saving me the trouble of answering you with commonplaces," said Judah, grasping the banker's proffered hand; "one can appreciate gratitude better when it is unspoken."

"There is something in that," replied the banker, thoughtfully; "the best, then, I can do is to honor your wish, Mr. ——"

"Engelsohn," expleted Judah.

"It would be easy to pun on the name under the circumstances," said Kronemann. Then he turned to his daughter, and his tone became more animated. "As usual, it is your fault that I find myself in a predicament. I gave you strict orders not to perform these incognito charitable exploits of yours unaccompanied. I warned you you would play the good Samaritan once too often, and come to a bad end."

"Annette has a cold, and the people were starving," answered the girl; "besides——"

"Yes, besides?"

"One may be disobedient in a good cause."

"That sounds horribly jesuitical, you little rebel," said her father, tapping her cheek smilingly; "but my head is not fit just now for unmasking the fallacy. I'll do something more simple: I shall ask Mr. Engelsohn to stop to lunch."

Judah did not answer immediately. Something told him not to accept—a sense of danger which had begun to possess him towards the end of their drive, and which gained fuel at the prospect of spending more time in the girl's immediate presence. He felt ashamed of his apprehension—as much as if he had uttered it aloud; it was so puerile. And, therefore, to spare his self-respect, he translated it into the necessity of seeing Vilenski. He told his would-be host that he had an appointment.

"I am exceedingly sorry," said Kronemann, heartily; "but I hope you will give me another opportunity of cultivating your acquaintance. Bertha, will you, as hostess, ask Mr. Engelsohn to call again?"

"For her sins," smiled Judah.

But from the tone and manner of her invitation it did not appear that Bertha regarded it in the light of a penance.

"Would you please leave your card?" she said shyly. "You may want a reminder."

Judah handed it to her, feeling he had ceded a bulwark of his safety. Once back in the street, he drew a breath of relief. Now that he was alone with

himself, he need not conceal what it was he feared. He did not want to come under a woman's spell—fall in love, as it was commonly called; he had heard that was the most terrible accident that could happen to a man. To love Kronemann's daughter? For Judah Engelsohn that would be an irreparable disaster. He must keep mastery over his emotions. He had his work to do—work that should be done well.

Vilenski was awaiting him anxiously; he had been given a confused account of what had occurred.

"Do you know who she is?" he asked, when he had heard the true version.

"I will tell you on condition that no one else knows," said Judah; "Bertha Kronemann."

"What, the banker's daughter?"

Judah nodded.

It took Vilenski a full minute to recover his breath. "And you say that as quietly as if it were the name of your washerwoman?" he shouted.

"Am I to go into hysterics?"

"Why, man," continued Vilenski, eagerly, "can't you read the stars? Don't you grasp the possibilities? You have free access to Heinrich Kronemann; you have eloquence enough to talk a fossil into life. If you can convert him to us, we can boldly, safely, write 'Victory' on our standard."

"I have thought of that myself," replied Judah, a little coldly; "possibly I may make the attempt. I really don't know whether I shall ever call there again."

Vilenski stared at him stupefied; but he asked no questions. He had learnt to look on Judah as an elemental mystery, and therefore took him for granted.

Week succeeded week, and Judah made the best of them. The Kronemann episode, as he called it to himself, was fading from his mind beneath the stress of work. Occasionally Bertha's face and voice came to trouble him. For antidote he worked harder. But at the end of a month arrived her reminder—the reminder which he had not desired, and which nevertheless gladdened him more than he dared admit. The note ran as follows:

"You are not paying me a compliment. I have not thanked you for your service. I intended, on your own principle, to evince my gratitude in my friendship. You evidently require neither. And I grieve for it. Bertha Kronemann."

After that he went, although he guessed what it would mean. He guessed right. He took away with him from his visit the consciousness that he lay in the balance; a hair's weight might decide whether henceforth he would belong to himself or to her. And that made him struggle on a little longer; but only a little. The third time he left her a vanquished man, but one who exulted in his downfall. It made him strong—even as the giant of old rose reinforced by contact with his Mother Earth. And that justified him in his own eyes. She did not sap his energies; she fed them till they overflowed with their exuberance. And because she did that, she was a laudable necessity. But then came a fear, a horrible fear that made him writhe. This spell, this enchantment in which he revelled was precarious; it hung on a thread. Any day, every day, he might lose the right to come to her for his inspiration; and the rest would be aim-

less, nameless agony—the slow-gnawing, relentless worm that poisoned and cankered and killed. One evening, as they were alone—she had been singing to him—she noticed the ungovernable terror in his eyes. She asked him what it meant.

"You ought to know," he said almost sullenly; "you put it there. One thing only can remove it."

"And that is?"

For reply he gave her a look, but no, it was not a look; it was his soul pointing its finger straight at her.

"Myself?" she exclaimed, drooping her head.

"Yourself. Will you do it? You know how."

"You have a right to ask the question," she said at last; "only it is not of me you should ask it—of my father. And"—a flush crept over her at the words—"ask him soon."

"To-morrow?" he ventured, scarcely articulating the word.

She hurried shamefacedly to the door; from there she nodded assent.

A minute after he was out in the street, and the dull thud of his footsteps was music in his ears. Everything was music and light and gladness. Perhaps it would be that only till to-morrow, but while it lasted he would quaff it to the dregs.

He had forgotten: to-morrow night had been fixed for the great public meeting when the Kadima would submit their programme of propaganda for the first time to the mass of their coreligionists. Judah, as the chief organizer, felt considerable anxiety as to its success; the blame of a fiasco might fall on him. He

was half sorry he had undertaken his interview with Kronemann for the following day; but there was no help for it now. Bertha might put a wrong construction on his dilatoriness. And, moreover, in the cool light of reflection, it seemed more desirable to put his fate to the hazard at the earliest. He shuddered: after all it was a hazard, and he might lose. Yet there was one comfort even in that; if he lost now, there would be nothing else the losing of which need cost him a single pang. Perhaps that was true happiness—to have suffered beyond the climax.

He had seen very little of the banker; even when he was in the house he showed himself but rarely. And as Judah, the following afternoon, knocked at the door of his study, he suddenly became aware that Bertha's father was comparatively a stranger to him, and that made his task more difficult. But the banker's cheery manner reassured him.

"You are the very man I want to see," he said, as Judah entered; "in fact, I was going to send for you. Sit down."

The banker strode silently once or twice across the room. Then he confronted Judah suddenly.

"I should like to ask a favor of you," he said quite solemnly; "I want you to marry my daughter. I am perfectly serious," he went on, noting the young man's look of amazement. "I have even gone so far as to first ascertain, very discreetly, her feelings on the subject. And while you think over my offer, I shall give you one or two reasons which prompted me to it. To begin, then, I liked you from the first, apart from the claim you had on my good-will. I liked your keep-

ing aloof when another man, relying on his merits, would have battered my walls in. Bertha wrote you that letter at my instigation. The thought of making you her husband came to me the second time you called; otherwise I should hardly have thrown you so much into each other's way. You think I know nothing about you, that I am rash in trusting my only child to a haphazard acquaintance. You are mistaken. A practiced reader of character, as I am, hardly needs more than a casual glance or two to draw his conclusions. I inferred you possessed common-sense, backbone, rectitude. That was all I required. I have no sons to keep the house from passing into strange hands after my death. My name would be forgotten. I want you for my successor. I want the firm of Kronemann and Co. to rank with the first in the world. Call it vanity—I desire to raise for myself a lasting monument. Another point, a matter of superstition, perhaps. My own good fortune was the outcome of accident. I was lucky enough to do the founder of the house almost as great a service as you have done me, and in consequence married his daughter. I have prospered; by the same token I prognosticate you will succeed in ratio to our beginnings. You see, I have been candid."

"O God! what am I to say?" breathed Judah, with beating heart.

The banker lifted his finger. "Wait, I have not quite finished; till then reserve your answer. It has come to my ears that you are one of the most prominent champions of the so-called National movement."

Judah rose eagerly, but the other waved him down and continued:—

"In view of that I want you to give me a guarantee —your word of honor will be sufficient—that you will once for all sever your connection with these hare-brained hobby-riders. The task which I impose on you is too difficult to allow any division of energy—too matter-of-fact to run smoothly alongside of soap-bubble hallucinations and day-dreamings. In short, I want to safeguard it against any possible rival in your affections. That is my only condition; no doubt you will find it easy."

"No, I do not find it easy," Judah burst out, battling with his despair. "You have been very cruel, Mr. Kronemann," he went on more gently; "you give me a glimpse into Paradise, and then tell me that I can gain entrance only by leaving behind the one thing I held dear on the hither side. Or did you only want to see what a Tantalus looked like?"

"Yes, viewed from that point, it certainly seems a little hard," reflected the banker; "only it is the wrong point. I respect your reluctance; it is good our ideals should die hard—it is what makes life worth living. And, therefore, when the time comes, let us be practical."

"By all means, then, let us be practical," assented Judah, with a sudden hope. "Tell me, Mr. Kronemann, have you given much thought to the question of our national regeneration?"

"Not much, I admit. I contented myself with listening to its advocacy by others. And what did I hear? Rodomontades in fustian that walked about on stilts to make them look big. And because they walked on stilts they were fairly easy to trip up."

"Quite so," said Judah, his voice quavering, "I will not presume to put any new aspect of the case before you. I have merely a burning desire to be practical. I shall tell you only what I can swear to. I have seen Jewish porters at the railway stations carrying three times their own weight of baggage; I have seen hundreds of Jewish wood-fellers cutting timber in the Lithuanian forests; I have seen droves of Jewish raftsmen on the Vistula working their way miles and miles against the current; and I have seen thousands of Jewish field-laborers harnessing themselves to their ploughs in place of the oxen they had sold to buy seed. You would call these men of muscle, I suppose.

"Yes," conceded the banker, hesitatingly.

"Again, in the house in which I live there are four students whose gymnasial reports show they were always at the top of their class. There is a little boy who can easily multiply rows of six figures in his head. There is a young artisan who has made the model of a steam crane without ever having handled a book on mechanics. There is also a hawker to whom six weeks ago I gave ten roubles to set him up, and who has made them into a hundred. All that would argue brains, I believe."

"I see your drift," said the banker.

"Please note that this is only the result of my own limited observation. These people are not exceptions, they are specimens. Here, then, you have brain and muscle—some of the material which goes to the making of a nation."

"Yes, some," emphasized the banker.

"The rest is merely a matter of organization, of arrangement," continued Judah. "We are sweeping away internal misunderstandings and differences; we are beginning to combine, to collaborate; we are no longer limbs, we are a body. And then there are the necessities of the case. These, of course, are self-evident."

"No," exclaimed the banker, "I will grant you everything but the necessities. This latter-day exodus is not wanted. It is merely the desire to repeat history. Our Jews here are perhaps a little more ground under heel than the rest of the proletariat. If so, it is the penalty they must pay for being as yet only step-children of their country. They must wait and work for their redemption as their brothers have done elsewhere. Possibly," he sank his voice, and looked round cautiously, "possibly they may not have long to wait. The signs are in the sky; the times are pregnant. What births they will bring forth no one can tell. Probably they will have a baptism of blood—some Jewish blood amongst it. We may not live to see it, but, sooner or later, deliverance will come—from within. Till then, patience."

"Ah, patience! patience!" muttered Judah, desolately; "and in the meantime our mother's heart is breaking to see her sons degraded into cattle, her daughters haled by the hair along the highways."

"There it is, the cloven hoof," said Kronemann lightly, to loosen the tension that was becoming awkward; "the sentimentalist revelling in generalities. Do you call that being practical? The man who talks like that is capable of writing his business letters in rhyme."

Judah stood motionless, his face set and a haggard wretchedness in his eyes. The banker saw it and was touched.

"I won't press you for an immediate decision," he said, his hand on Judah's shoulder. "I shall give you—say, twenty-four hours. That is as much as any man wants—I shall be candid again—to reconcile himself to his good fortune. By the way, you will find Bertha in the drawing-room; she may help you to your determination."

Judah waited. "Is there no compromise possible?" he quavered.

"None; there are two alternatives; you will do well to keep that in mind. It will save you from complicating your methods of reasoning."

Gropingly Judah made his way up the escalier. At the drawing-room door he stopped and listened. She was playing the piece she knew to be his favorite. A wild longing came over him; if his life went forfeit over it, he must see her once more.

She turned at the click of the handle and rose quickly, but as she saw his face, she hung back with her hand to her heart.

"You have asked father," she faltered at last; "he has refused, and has sent you to me to say good-bye."

"On the contrary," he replied voicelessly, "your father was good enough to give *me* the chance of refusal."

And then he told her quickly what had happened. "You have small reason to be pleased with me," he ended up; "I could win you by the stretching out of my arm—and I hesitate because of an hallucination, a day-dream, as your father calls it."

"That only shows your love is worth having," she said almost inaudibly.

"Suppose, then, I persist in this day-dream?"

"Judah, you will not persist? Oh, say you will not."

He turned from her with a dumb gesture of despair. She came close to him.

"Listen, Judah," she whispered; "I do not call it a shadow, an illusion. To me it is a great, grand reality. Many a time the thought of it has set my nerves tingling; many a time I have said, 'O that I could help.' Look, I am turning traitress against my own father. Make concessions to his caprice—if only in appearance. Later on, when the irrevocable has happened, you will always find ways and means to be of service to the cause, indirectly——"

He shook his head wearily. "I am to give my word—you have forgotten that." And then he flamed up. "You have made one suggestion, I shall make a second. If my love is worth having, then follow your heart's bidding and none other. You said yourself one may be disobedient in a good cause; now prove it. You can help the good cause by helping me. Without you I am useless, an empty husk; with you I could achieve miracles. And I promise you, the honor of it shall be yours and yours only. It is in your hands to raise your father a monument a thousand times more durable than the one he dreams of himself. Bertha, I repeat, it is in your hands!"

She listened to him patiently, but her voice was very sad as she replied: "I have deserved this—I must not complain. I counselled treachery—you counsel open

revolt. A few words will answer you: I dare not—for the life of my father—I dare not. A year ago he broke a blood-vessel Any sudden shock, and I tremble for the consequences. Do you want it to be on my conscience——"

She broke off, and buried her face in her hands.

"Then nothing remains," he said hollowly.

"Yes, twenty-four hours of reflection remain," came from her quickly.

"Twenty-four hours of torture," he echoed. "Would to God I had them behind me—whichever of my two loves they will bury."

"Judah!"

He saw the passionately uplifted hands, and went out. The gesture haunted him. Again and again he tried to put it from him. He wanted his mind clear, crystal clear. He had to think—think, when his thoughts were so many snowflakes whirling wildly in the hurricane of his emotions. No, he would let it be for the present. Later on it would come to him of its own accord, without racking, without writhing. This was a useless riot of pain; he must be calm, or he would die.

Colorlessly the hours dragged by till it was seven o'clock. Mechanically he made his way to the hall where the meeting was to take place.

Vilenski looked at his white, wan face, and asked: "What, you, Judah? Lamp-fever? Stage-fright? What are we others to say then?"

Judah made a great effort, and parried the inquiry. No prying, no questioning, or he must strangle something—himself by preference. As in a dream he

watched the huge hall filling steadily. He felt the great subtle waves of excitement undulating through the assembly, at first only distantly, but presently they came nearer; the first thrill touched his soul, pain-numbing, healing, life-giving. He began to hope again; yes, his decision would come to him in a flash, without a throe. And once he had it in his grasp it might kill him, but he would not let it go. Better a hell of certainty than an ecstasy of doubt.

The greatest Jewish scholar in Warsaw occupied the chair. One by one the speakers rose, gripped the ear of the audience, and sent their message, blood-warm, down to their hearts. The waves of excitement waxed into billows of enthusiasm. Judah's speech had been left to the last; it was to be the climax, the coping-stone on the fabric that was to be reared that night.

A hush, throbbing with the pulse of its own stillness, held the gathering as he came forward. Every ear, every eye strained, lest a word, a movement of face or hand should escape it. Judah felt the magnetic silence that argued his power; but he himself was dissatisfied; he was wasting breath. This was not what he meant. He was not striving to convince them, he wanted to carry conviction to his own heart. And in that he had failed so far. His utterances seemed to him idle antics of sound. But at last he struck the right note. He touched on the joy of self-surrender that made a sacrifice of its bleeding heart, and looked on smilingly, as on a thank-offering; that gave up life and love because that was the most one can give up, and because the best could be fed and fostered only with what was best. His hearers grew frightened, for this was the

first time they had seen a human soul stand before them in its white-gleaming nakedness. Judah had conquered, and so he could sing his song of self-victory.

"The land of Kedem is trembling with joy to its inmost caverns," rose his pæan; "its soil is quickening with prophetic gladness, and mightily is Jordan rearing his waters to pour teeming fruitfulness into its bosom; for that the songs of the Lord shall once more re-echo on his banks, and that the singers' voices might not grow faint for hunger. There is a rustling in the cedars of Lebanon, which have been as cypresses in their desolation; their branches are whispering one to the other: 'Be joyful; the wanderer is returning home, the outcast is coming into his own again.' And in his rock-dwelling, Father Abraham is listening, night and day, that he may be the first to catch the myriad footfalls of his sons, marching eastward. Aye, brothers, up and towards the Sunrise!"

Judah stopped, but the vibrating hush continued long after the last word had left his lips. Then came the first ripple of applause that heralded the coming cataract. Already it had gathered itself into moderate fulness; already it had started to reverberate—but instead of the cataract, it suddenly oozed out into a dull, sullen buzz of consternation.

"Dead, dead," people were murmuring, "Heinrich Kronemann is dead."

Judah caught the words, not once, but a dozen times, as he forced his way out through the way-giving throng. In a quarter-of-an-hour he had reached the mansion. A few gaping quidnuncs were hovering round. Judah stopped one of the footmen, who had

just come back from an errand. Yes, it was true. A telegram had brought bad news that evening, and the master had had a stroke. Slowly, very slowly, Judah walked back to his lodgings. He was wondering whether it would be counted against him on Judgment Day that he was glad he needed not to give an answer to-morrow. To Bertha he wrote: "I shall come when you want me."

It was a month after that she wanted him. They were standing together at the window, peering into the twilight.

"I had no compunction in renewing my suit," said Judah, tenderly; "it was not inciting you to revolt. Your father's project, even had he lived, has become an impossibility. The Government monopoly that wrecked his investments and broke his heart took good care of that. You are not going counter to his will."

"Do you know, Judah," she said solemnly, "I sometimes am afraid his death was God's visitation on his purblindness."

"Afraid? You should exult—exult that his death has not been useless, if it only strengthens our belief in the Providence that watches our destiny. You can say, then, he died for our cause. He shall have his monument. His memory shall go with us as we struggle towards the Sunrise."

ON THE ROAD TO ZION

(ANOTHER VIEW OF THE FOREGOING)

LEIB, Hirsh, and Wolf were loitering at the street corner, with a vague and purposeless air about them. This was chiefly noticeable by the resolute manner in which they kept their hands inside their trousers pockets, having, apparently, no other use for them.

"What's the good of having a holiday, when you don't know what to do with it?" grumbled Hirsh.

The other two answered the question, or, rather, echoed it by their silence. It was indeed a pitiable state of things. Here were three healthy youngsters, totalling as much as thirty years among them; a clear sky with plenty of sun—the season was late summer—a whole day of perfect, wholesale irresponsibility—in fact, all the ingredients for Paradisiacal bliss without a saucepan to cook them in.

"Let's go and tie the ropemaker's flax into knots," suggested Leib.

"We did that only last week," replied Hirsh, with withering scorn at Leib's want of originality.

"Each time the man passes me he looks murder," attested Wolf.

"Suppose we find a dead cat, and fling it on old Chava's vegetable stall," continued Leib, unabashed.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Wolf, warmly; "we've got potatoes for dinner to-day, and I don't know if mother has bought hers."

"Torba, the butcher's wife, has hung out her washing," Leib went on to remark dreamily, leaving the others to gauge the scope of the possibilities connected with the event.

"Yes, but when she does, that bull-dog of hers walks about loose—ever since that time," Hirsh reminded him, the reminder opening up a black vista of iniquity.

Leib shrugged his shoulders and sighed. That sigh was his lament over the finality of earthly things. A pathetic silence followed his heroic attempts to infuse interest into their dreary existence. Then he stamped his foot, and shouted fiercely at Wolf:—

"Where's that rascal of a Noah? You must know —you live in the same house. If we only had him. . ."

"I've already told you I don't know," interrupted Wolf, unconcernedly; "since last night he's invisible."

"Not so far as I can see," put in Hirsh, shading his eyes and peering ahead. "Why, here he comes."

"Where?" cried the other two in a breath. As a rule, Noah's arrival on the scene—any scene—was heralded by a ringing whoop. This time there was no whoop, and that rather staggered them.

"To be sure, there he is," they were compelled to admit the next instant, despite the absence of the customary evidence.

"He's got cramp in his legs, he walks so slowly," observed Hirsh, solemnly.

"If he has, it isn't from tight boots," remarked Wolf, with a covert allusion to Noah's bare feet. Any other time he would have raised a laugh, but there was something portentous in the funereal pace at which Noah was locomoting himself.

"Bless me, he's turning the other way!" cried Leib, in amazement. "What's happened to him?"

And then he lifted up a stentorian voice, and called him loudly by name. Noah evidently heard him, for in response he shook his drooping head, and continued the sorrowful tenor of his way. The trio became thoroughly alarmed; the mystery of Noah's demeanor had its terrors. In a moment they had scampered to his side; but Noah waved them off with a gesture of unspeakable grief.

"Anything wrong at home?" asked Leib, hurriedly.

"Worse," breathed Noah.

"Tell us," came in unison.

"Not here," said Noah wearily; "somewhere where we shall be all alone."

That was easy enough; if their little native place was rich in anything, it was in uninhabited environment, amidst which it lay—a dot in the infinite.

"This will do," said Leib, making halt at a disused barn.

Noah acquiesced, and somewhat ostentatiously brushing away an imaginary tear, he began:—

"I am disgraced for life. Last night—you know what happened last night?"

The trio looked conscious; they, as well as a certain pear-tree, could have told what had happened for one thing.

"Last night," recommenced Noah, intently studying the shrunken grass at his feet, "was a meeting of the Brothers of Zion. All the grown-up people went to hear that wonderful Maggid * that's been all over

* Itinerant preacher.

the world, trying to preach us Jews back into Jerusalem. So I just slipped in as well, to see if he was really worth the fuss they are all making about him. Well, I can only tell you he *is*. The way he kept twisting up his face—each time differently—and rolled his eyes, and swung his arms round, jabbering all the time, was a thing I wouldn't have missed for a pot of beet-root soup."

And Noah drew a long breath, and sat lost in the reminiscence of the spectacle.

"Well?" urged his hearers, impatiently. They were getting sorry they had not been there as well, despite the successfully exploited pear-tree.

Noah pulled himself up as though dragged back into a horrible reality.

"Yes, I enjoyed myself while that Maggid lasted," he continued; "I didn't feel a bit inclined to make a move, even if we hadn't all been jammed in as tight as raisins in the straining-cloth. But after him, Simcha, the cobbler, got up, and talked at us through his nose, and that made me fidgety. I shifted a leg—just so much—and at once one of the men in my neighborhood turned round, and said, if I kicked him again, I should not live to be Barmitzvah. And presently another of them said that if I went on digging my elbow into his ribs, I should fit a small coffin. So all I could do was to sit there wagging my head; and suddenly—upon my word, I couldn't help it—Satan came and jogged my voice, and out I burst with a 'kickerikee' that went bang, right through the place. Well, then you should have seen the hollabaloo. Shmaya, the beadle, bustled up, took me by the scruff,

and pommelled me out of the hall, saying that if I was a cock-a-doodle-do, he would use me as a ransom-offering for the Eve of Atonement."

"Yes, that's very sad, I'm sure," commented Wolf, with the suspicion of a smile; he was glad that, after all, the pear-tree had been the best policy; "but there's no reason to be so disheartened about it—don't you think so?" he appealed to the others.

"Not by any means," assented Leib; "you get even with Shmaya as soon as you can, and there the matter ends."

"That's your idea of it," replied Noah, disconsolately; "you think it's nothing to be called a woe and a disgrace to Israel, to be cuffed and pommelled in sight of the whole town, like a—like a——"

The power of comparison failed him for the moment, and no one thought of helping him out. "I shall never be able to lift my eyes up again," he concluded dismally.

The others sat quiet, awed into silence by this exhibition of moral sensitiveness, of which they had never considered Noah capable.

"Well, what can you do?" asked Wolf, at length.

"I was just making up my mind when you disturbed me. At first I thought of slaughtering all the people in the place, but that wouldn't do, would it?"

His hearers agreed that it was too radical a measure, and that its possibility was doubtful.

"Then I had another plan, but——"

"Speak out," said Hirsh, encouragingly.

"But you must promise to help me. I might do it alone, only I'm not selfish. I want you all to have some of the glory."

"Glory?" echoed Leib, suspiciously. "Are you sure it won't be something else?"

"If you're frightened, of course——" and Noah stopped eloquently short.

Leib took the aspersion on his courage with philosophic calm.

"'Buy the cat in the bag, and you'll find it's blind,'" he quoted. "Anyway, let's hear."

With conspirator-like caution Noah looked round him. He knew there could be no eavesdroppers, but he did it for effect, and succeeded. Their curiosity redoubled.

"I got the idea of it from what the Maggid said last night," he confided to them in a whisper; "he said this wasn't our proper home, and that we had no business to live anywhere but in Jerusalem."

"Well, then, why don't we?" interrupted Hirsh.

"Because we can't get in, that's why. There are some people there that believe in the moon, and don't keep Passover; they've made themselves quite at home in the place, and if they let one or two of us in, they think they're doing us a great favor. And so we've got to stick here and give money to the burgomaster not to let the Christians smash our windows."

"That's certainly most unfair," observed Wolf; "but where's that glory you were talking about?"

Noah put on his most impressive manner. "That's coming. Look here. It's all very well for the Maggid to go on spouting by the hour, but what's the good of it? It's only wasting time—the moon-people can't hear him, and so they don't know what we want. Suppose we let him go on spouting and calling them

names, while we, the four of us, take a little walk over to them, and—are you frightened, Leib?"

"Go on," said Leib, his ears quick-set.

"And say to them: 'You're a pack of thieves—just clear out of here; this place belongs to us, and we're going to have it. If not, we'll send you Moses, and he'll make it lively for you with plagues.' Or, perhaps, we might talk to them more politely—something like this: 'Would you mind kindly moving to another country—because our parents want to come back here—they aren't at all comfortable where they are, and they would be much obliged to you for it. You can take your moon away with you—we've got one of our own.' Well, Leib, what do you think of it?"

"But the glory?" insisted Wolf.

"Don't you see, you blockhead?" resumed Noah. "Of course, they'll say 'Yes,' and then we'll come back, and tell our people: 'It's all right about Jerusalem—we've got it. Pack up your bundles, and say good-bye to the burgomaster. He'll be sorry to see you go; he won't have anybody to give him roubles now. And then, you see, we'll all be petted and stuffed with honey-cake—just as the Maggid is now—and when we grow up, they'll make us wardens of the synagogue. Only you mustn't forget to let everybody know that it was my idea—just to show them I can do something more than cry 'kickerikee.'"

The trio looked at Noah, and then turned their glances on one another.

"There's something in it," said Leib, tentatively.

"Something?" iterated Noah, scornfully.

"Well, *something*," said Leib, with more emphasis.

"If it comes off it might be a good thing for all of us," was Hirsh's opinion.

"At any rate, it would give us something to do for the day," put in Wolf.

The last remark carried great weight. It almost convinced Leib.

"How far is it to Jerusalem?" he asked.

"Is that you, Leib?" said Noah, with affected surprise. "I shouldn't have thought it, not for a moment. A proper man like you does things first, and asks questions afterwards. However," he condescended to inform the inquirer, "it can't be so very far, because, when you stand on the hill, and look straight in front, you can see where the world comes to an end, and the sky begins. I should think we could be there and back by bedtime."

"It's a good idea, distinctly," Leib now stated with great positiveness. The subtle flattery of being called a proper man had wormed its way deep into his soul.

"What do you say?" asked Noah, of the two others.

"We might have a try," replied Hirsh, thoughtfully.

"But what about dinner?" interposed Wolf.

Even Noah, in his idealist mood, was bound to concede the practical nature of the question.

"Oh, we'll wait for it—plenty of time to start afterwards. Only you mustn't say anything at home; it would come nicer as a surprise. And don't let us wait for one another; let's walk back here singly; people might suspect something, if they saw us march out in a body."

His enthusiasm had magnified the outward aspect of the skimpy little band into that of a devastating army.

Then they returned home, and drove their respective mothers frantic with clamorings for the accelerated appearance of the midday meal. When they regathered at their place of assignment, Leib had girded himself with a tin sabre, Wolf bore in his hand a trumpet, which blew two distinct and separate notes, and Hirsh was found to be possessed of eleven copecks, which discovery was hailed with universal acclamation. Only Noah appeared unaugmented, and consequently thought it incumbent on him to extenuate the fact.

"You see, I've brought my mouth with me," he said, "because I shall have to do the talking when we get there."

The others generously refrained from pointing out that he was making a virtue of a necessity, and immediately formed themselves into a council of war.

"I suppose I am going to be captain," said Hirsh, without preliminary.

"You—why?" came indignantly from Leib and Wolf.

"Because I've got the money to pay the travelling expenses."

"That's not what makes people captains," said Leib, loftily; "it's this."

He drew his sabre from its sheath, and brandished it vehemently.

"What's that good for?" cried both Wolf and Hirsh.

"To frighten the moon-people, if they should take it into their heads to say 'No,'" was the ready answer.

"Ha! ha! you've got to get at them first; and that's where I come in," jeered Wolf.

"How—with that rotten trumpet of yours?" screamed Hirsh and Leib, one after the other.

"Certainly. Suppose the place is locked up? Who's going to blow down the walls as they did at Jericho?"

Noah had held aloof from the altercation, partly from chagrin at the rank ingratitude that so callously ignored his own overwhelming claims, and partly from foreknowledge how the squabbling would end, namely, by leaving things as they were.

"Suppose we're all captains?" he remarked quietly.

The others looked stupefied. Why hadn't they thought of that before? Yes, Noah was a great man —only they didn't tell him so, for fear he should get too conceited.

"All right, let's get on," said Leib, sheathing his sword and striding on resolutely. Thus the four mighty adventurers started on their mission of conquest. They felt brisk and buoyant; the consciousness of their high purpose annihilated all possibility of failure. The sun, too, was in very good form that day, and made itself agreeable without becoming a nuisance; apparently it had also just had a good dinner.

They kept to the high road, and had been walking a quarter of an hour when they met a peddler. The latter, suspecting them to be the offspring of potential customers, thought it policy to be polite to them.

"Good morning, young gentlemen," he sang out.

"Is this right for Jerusalem?" asked Noah, by way of reply.

The peddler was hot and hungry, and the thought that they were trifling with him made him vindictive.

"Impudent little rogues," he muttered, and then he added aloud: "Yes, quite right; keep straight ahead, as far as ever you can go."

"I told you so," said Noah, triumphantly, to his comrades.

"If it *is* the right road, then we may as well walk faster; the days aren't so long now, you know," observed Wolf.

"Never mind, there's sure to be a moon to-night," said Noah, reassuringly, "and if there isn't, we'll borrow one from the moon-people to use for a lantern."

"Are they very tall—these robbers?" asked Leib.

"Not taller than we; when they stand up, their legs reach down to the ground, and ours do the same," replied Noah, speciously.

"But suppose they don't understand our language," continued Leib.

"Then you must make your sabre talk to them," said Noah, a little maliciously.

Leib did not remonstrate, but began to entertain some doubts whether he had been altogether wise in giving such prominence to his possession of the weapon.

On and on they went, with short intervals of rest, through the declining afternoon. Several vehicles laden with garden produce, on the way to next day's market, passed them, and a general feeling gained ground that Hirsh ought to justify his boast of financing the enterprise. Just then a wagon-load of luscious plums came lumbering on. Noah was spokesman: "I say, Hirsh, this will be the last of them."

"Last of what?"

"Of the fruit wagoners. If you don't buy of him, we may not get another chance."

The cart had come abreast of them, and Hirsh felt

that unless he seized the opportunity he might forfeit a good deal of his popularity.

"How much will you give us for eleven copecks?" he accosted the driver.

"Eleven copecks?" said the man. "Oh, a whole orchard. Let's have the money." He pulled up, and reaching down grabbed the coins Hirsh imprudently held out to him. Then he dived, chuckling, under his box, and pulled out a greasy little paper bag, which he threw to Hirsh.

"These are only stones—I want plums," said the latter indignantly.

"Quite so—if you plant them you'll have a whole orchard in time, as I said."

"But——" began Hirsh again.

"Now, that's enough—skip," said the man, and raised his whip threateningly.

Chafing and chop-fallen, Hirsh skulked back to the others. They had witnessed the whole transaction, and, therefore, it was unnecessary for him to go into the humiliating details. But if he expected sympathy, he was disappointed. From their cold looks and freezing disdain he could gather that their opinion of his business capacities and knowledge of human nature had sunk below zero.

It was on Leib that the unfortunate episode fell most heavily. He had eaten herring at dinner, and was becoming reminded of the fact by an ever-increasing thirst. Greedily his eyes travelled to the right and left of him on the chance of lighting upon some opportunity of quenching it.

"Look, what's that?" he asked suddenly, pointing

to a little rivulet, the waters of which were tinged dirty white from the clay stratum of its bed.

Noah went close up to it. Presently he gave a great cry. "As I live, we're getting there," he gasped.

"Where?" asked the others.

"To the Holy Land. Does not the Bible say it's a land flowing with milk and honey? And here is the milk. Taste it, Leib."

Leib's thirst, together with the clay, gave color to the theory. Without another thought he threw himself flat, and, shutting his eyes, took a good deep draught of the fluid, and before he had time to realize its untasty quality, a mouthful of it had found its way into his interior. He scrambled up hastily.

"Isn't it milk?" asked Noah, anxiously.

"Yes, it's milk, milk of a kind—I mean very good milk; won't any of you try a drop?"

But the others had seen the wry mouth he had made, and preferred to take his word in guarantee of its excellence.

The quartet of patriots marched on, a good deal less sanguine and jaunty than they had appeared at the start. A slight tension also began to manifest itself in their attitude towards one another. Talk was scarce and chiefly monosyllabic. It was Hirsh who all at once made up for the long silence by a tremendous howl. The others turned on him with startled faces.

"Oh, I'm killed," wailed Hirsh, his hand to his nose; "I'm stung to death."

"Stung, did you say?" asked Noah, eagerly.

"Yes, a big, big bee," said Hirsh, toning his voice down to a whimper.

A transfigured look came over Noah's face. "Aren't you convinced now?" he cried exultantly. "Don't you see we must be near our destination? Where there are bees there is honey. I wasn't quite sure when Leib found the milk, but here is the honey, too. Come on, we shall soon be there."

His enthusiasm did a good deal towards galvanizing their drooping spirits back into life. But only for a little time, for by now the sun had got down to the uttermost rim of the sky; their shadows became grotesquely long, and their faces followed suit. They were all weary and footsore, and more and more frequently misgivings as to the outcome of their errand flitted through their minds. But Noah held them on to it sturdily. He had not lost hope; the horizon was becoming swallowed up by the outer edge of the darkness, and that made it appear less and less distant. Jerusalem must be quite near now; it surely could not be situated on the very brink of the world, or else it would have toppled over long ago. Ah, there was the moon, too—just a bit of it—and farther on——

Noah uttered a shout of triumph. Right across their path lay a vast stretch of masonry in the shape of high bleak walls relieved only by a number of little windows near the top. He did not know that these were the huge granaries of Rostock, which supply all that part of the world with wheat; to him they were the battlements of Jerusalem, the City of Promise.

They had come quite close, and looked with beating hearts. There were no gates, because the approaches were all on the other side. Then, after a little pause, Noah whispered to Wolf:

"Now, out with your trumpet, and blow as they blew at Jericho."

Wolf tried hard to beat down the sinful pride that throbbed through his bosom at the words. So, after all, he was the greatest of them; it was he who was going to gain his nation entrance into their heritage. He raised the trumpet to his lips; at first his wind refused him service, but then he made a great effort, and out came a squeaky, discordant noise that made them all shiver. But it did not make the walls shiver; they stood firm, uncompromisingly firm. The second blast, however, issued a little more like what a healthy blast should be, and Wolf was just in the middle of the third, a glorious success. Noah could have sworn he saw the brickwork near one of the windows totter, when suddenly something that looked like a child's head came hurtling through the air, struck Wolf's trumpet, and drove it half-way into his gullet. Simultaneously came a voice growling in very plain Russian:

"What do you mean, you ragamuffins, by startling an honest, hard-worked man out of his sleep? I wish I had had a brick handy instead of that cabbage."

The rest of the harangue was wasted, for it found not the listeners for whom it was intended. These latter were scampering away along the road they had come, like so many scalded cats. But at last they had to slow up; they hadn't any legs left to run with. So they crawled along without a word or a look for one another. But by-and-by, as they were getting more assured that they had escaped the impending doom, whatever shape it might have taken, little black thoughts popped up in the hearts of the trio, and

wicked little voices whispered in their ears. Something about Noah they whispered. Leib heard them say quite distinctly that it was through Noah that he had been nearly poisoned with ditch-water. Hirsh they told that it was Noah's fault he had been stabbed almost mortally, and had been rendered a pauper; and Wolf they asked whether, had it not been for this same Noah, he would have got that trumpet rammed so disagreeably down his throat. And, presently, Hirsh, in whom the desire for revenge was strongest, because of the preponderance of his wrongs, made certain overtures to Leib in a subdued voice. Noah, who was slinking along in front, caught a word or two with ears sharpened by a nameless apprehension; but when, a little later, he found that Wolf had also joined the conclave, then he knew that there was need of quick action to avert his evil destiny.

"We took the wrong road, that's all," he said, turning round nonchalantly; "I remember now——"

That was as far as he got. "I'll give you something to remember," Hirsh said, hurling himself furiously on the author of his misfortunes; "I'll teach you to take us on a fool's errand."

Wolf and Leib were not long in reinforcing Hirsh's efforts to impart to Noah the afore-mentioned instruction; and Noah was just considering if he had not better sham being dead, and then, as his assailants drew off to contemplate their handiwork, make a desperate dash for life, when all at once there was heard the shouting of many voices, lights were flashing in all directions, and a minute after the four knights-errant were doing penance across the knees of their distracted fathers.

The infamy resulting from his outrage on the Brothers of Zion did not attach to Noah for very long. The following week he eclipsed it by sending the President of the Holy Society for Preparing the Dead for Burial to Shmaya's house on the strength of a premature announcement of the latter's decease.

AN ALIEN IMMIGRANT

He—that is, Solomon—was certainly the oracle of the place. His authority on politics, art, science, and all other things that more or less affected this world and the next, was undisputed. Saturday, from midday to the hour of the afternoon service, he gave consultations, sat in his seat, and uttered revelations. The family-heads who were *habitués* of the little place of worship listened to him open-mouthed and open-eared; but occasionally a casual visitor who knew not of Solomon's greatness would venture a suggestion, and then the floodgates of Solomon's wisdom were opened, and his knowledge came sweeping down in a torrent on the bold questionist, making sport of his opinion in a whirlpool of sense-bewildering information. I was perhaps the only one of his audience that knew what a humbug old Solomon was; I, at least, was aware that what the others thought the gleanings of a laboriously accumulated world-wisdom, was the spontaneous manufacture of the moment. Solomon had a vivid imagination: nothing else could account for the perversions of the natural order of things for which he was responsible—for the alliances between hostile dynasties, for translocations of vast territories, which gave the lie to all our received notions of geography—for regeneration schemes that would shortly make the earth a paradise. Still, he was entertaining, and gave a distinct relish to the somnolent Sabbath afternoons that were apt to

hang heavy on my hands. He was the beadle of the little congregation, and in his unconsecrated moments sold lottery tickets. In his after-business hours he wrote door-post amulets. He was also, for some mysterious reason, the best performer on the ram's-horn during the high festivals, and the fame of his efficiency brought him many pupils. Otherwise he was a solitary man, without kith or kin in London. Not that he seemed to want any one, because he managed very well for himself, bought his own provisions, kept his own house, which amounted to a single-roomed flat in Montague Buildings, and no one who looked at the squat, sturdy figure and the tawny beard would have credited them to a man of sixty.

I had seen Solomon pose as a demi-god, and was very keen to know him as a man. Strong individuality was stamped like a hall-mark on every feature of his face, and made one forget its commonplaceness; and the expression upon it was one not acquired in the elementary school of tribulation. He seemed to have been taught one of those lessons which stock a man with sufficient education in character to last him all his lifetime. And if this was mere conjecture on my part, it was perhaps his habitual reticence about himself that made me drape his past with shadows. I did not, however, despair of solving this sexagenarian riddle.

One Sabbath afternoon I found him sitting in solitary grandeur. He explained to me that a domestic event had happened in the house of Stocklinski, the congregation treasurer, and that there had been an exodus *en masse* to 2, Penny Street, in token of good-will to the new arrival and the two parties responsible for it.

Solomon and the treasurer were eternally at feud, because the latter insisted on countersigning the receipts, which Solomon took for a slur on his trustworthiness. I blessed Stocklinski for his calligraphic officiousness, because it gave me at last an opportunity of a quiet *tête-à-tête* with Solomon.

"I am surprised to see how you bamboozle your seat-holders, Solomon," I said offhand. "If they found you out, they would give you the sack."

He smiled all along the expanse of his strong, healthy teeth.

"The sheep's-heads," he said disdainfully in his peculiar idiom, half English, half everything else; "they know they have hands and feet, and nothing more. Isn't it the same all the world over? If you tell a lie, and keep a sober face on it, not even Elijah the prophet would find you out—and this is not a congregation of prophets."

"Well, Solomon," I answered, "I am not much of a prophet myself, but I know when I get hoodwinked, and that ought to take the spice out of your fabrications."

"You misjudge me, my son, if you think I lie for the mere pleasure of lying," he said. "May there not be in a man's life one bitter truth, one sad reality, to forget which he dwells in a world of dreams and imaginings? And if he deceives others, he is perhaps but practicing how best to deceive himself."

There was a pause; I felt the old man's rebuke, but I also felt that it contained no malice—only sorrow, infinite sorrow, such as my remark could not have caused, had his nature been the most sensitive.

"They say you were taken prisoner at Sebastopol—" I resumed.

"Quite true," he interrupted. "I came over as the Queen's guest—she sent me an invitation through thirty thousand men, several generals amongst them—and that is more than most foreigners over here can say." And he smiled at his own quaint view of the case.

My nerves began to tingle. Here was a man who had seen death and destruction in the wholesale, who had played skittles with his life and limb, and survived to tell the tale. I was young, and so I felt the strong fascination of the man who could talk so dispassionately of a reality the mere conception of which set my flesh in a tremor.

"You were taken prisoner and conveyed to Plymouth," I continued, in order to keep the topic in evidence. Solomon had a habit of dodging the point at issue. "How does it feel to be taken prisoner in war?"

A far-away look had come into his eyes.

"Yes, I was brave in those days," he said slowly—"very brave; but then I did not care what happened, and perhaps it is an easy thing to be brave when you feel like that." He suddenly recollected himself, and went on with a short laugh: "Ah, you want to know how I was taken prisoner? Why, all the little children know the story; I have told it hundreds of times. Well, I was stationed in the south suburbs—Karabelnaya, I believe they call it; I don't know why, but the enemy seemed to be bearing us a special grudge, for it was here that their guns were closest to the city walls—ugly looking iron brutes with impudent, prying nozzles. Oc-

casionally they suffered from a catarrh, and then they sneezed cannon-balls and coughed fire-clouds, till I thought it was Sodom and Gomorrah all over again, only that the righteous were no better off than the sinners. Every day the cursed things came nearer and nearer, till we scarcely had any breathing room left. I was serving in Poniatowski's regiment—a crew of dare-devils and scamps, who stole the boots from each other's feet, and ate them. I tell you, leather was a delicacy in those days, after the tallow had given out. The knife was grazing our throat, and Kerkoff, our colonel, went about like a dog with a scalded tail.

"'Children,' he said one day, 'do you see that powder-tower?'

"We saw it clearly enough; we had been well acquainted with it for months. It was the enemy's chief ammunition depôt, and there were barrels and barrels of the deadly stuff in it.

"'Well,' Kerkoff went on, 'I want a man to make it jump; one man can do it, but he won't be much good for anything else afterwards. That will give us a respite before they bring up fresh supplies, and in the meantime perhaps we can break our way through. Who will volunteer?'

"Then we knew that one of us had to die. If there were no volunteers, the lot would decide. So I stepped forward—I was afraid the lot would miss me."

"You, Solomon, volunteered?" I interrupted him with a start. "And for certain death, too? What made you do it?"

"What made me do it?" he repeated. I was used to his repeating my questions; it was not the effect of

a laborious comprehension, but of the mechanical habit to which all his section of his race are subject. "I had nothing to live for—the bullets avoided me, though they slew right and left; and when you get tired of waiting for a thing, you go forth to meet it." He broke off, and again the far-away look came into his eyes.

I pitied him in silence; I could not do more—it is presumption to comfort a man, if he chooses to make the shadows of his sorrow inscrutable.

"And yet you escaped?" I said, to arouse him from his reverie. "How did it happen?"

"How it happened?" he iterated, looking up heavily. "I have forgotten how exactly. I am an old man, and it is long ago; but I remember crawling through the trenches, fuse and tinder-box in hand, till suddenly I felt a grip on my shoulder, and saw a young English officer—big as Og, King of Bashan—loom down upon me.

"'What are you doing here?' he said in Russian. I could not answer, because his hold on me was so tight, so I showed him my fuse and the fire apparatus, and pointed to the powder-tower.

"'Oh, I see,' he gasped, and his teeth came together with a snap. 'Blow us up, did you want to? Well, you are an ambitious man, but your life before ours,' and he pulled out his revolver. 'However, I give you a chance—will you die, or surrender?'

"And as he was standing there, the long rod of his revolver bearing on me, I was reminded of Rabbi Nathan at the Talmud School—how he once stood over me with his cane, because I did not know my lesson,

and the lesson was a sentence from Mishnah: 'If a man consent to his own death, unless it be for the honor of God and our Sacred Writ, it shall be as though he were the cause thereof, and his blood shall be on his own head.' And the punishment of the suicide, you know, is Gehennah—you jump from the roaring furnace into the ice-cold water, and back again, and so on for all eternity. But that did not matter; I had got used to Gehennah and things worse in the last three months of the siege—what with scorching my skin brown in putting out the blazing buildings, and then shivering with ague during nights of sentry duty. And it all passed through my mind like a flash.

"'Then I will die, your Honor,' I said. The officer looked startled.

"'Well, you are the first man who asked me to have his brains blown out,' he said. "If I had liked the job, I should not have given you a chance of asking. Anyway, I am not going to turn assassin to please a Russian, even if he is as brave as you are.

"'But I am a Jew, your Honor,' I tempted him.

"He laughed. 'That makes no difference in our notions. I shall say that you have deserted, and then you won't get shot.' Then he called the guard. Well, you know the rest."

I was hanging spellbound on Solomon's lips. His narrative was like a rocket that has burnt itself to ashes before one can gather all its wonderful effects. The vacuum it left in my understanding was almost painful. And yet I comprehended the pregnant terseness, the absence of adorning, self-laudatory detail in the old man's simple words. It was that his adven-

ture, apart from the distance of its occurrence and the familiarity of its recollection, meant nothing to him. It existed in his mind not for itself, but because it was the result of some cause, and the cause overshadowed the result, and effaced it. It is not often that people give such an earnest of their satiety of life as Solomon had done.

"Yes, Solomon, everybody has his troubles," I remarked, more in answer to my own thoughts, and feeling half-ashamed of my platitude. "The difference is in the way we bear them: on some of us the least trifles fall like a sledge-hammer blow—to others the heaviest tribulation is but a soap-bubble of fate."

"Do not our sages say the human heart is less brittle than iron?" he replied, with rather more interest than my truisms warranted. "I could tell you a story of a man——" he stopped, and looked at the round-faced clock that gave the little balcony connecting the two women's galleries quite a cyclopean appearance. "The masters will not be back for an hour—if you care to listen to an old gabbler like me, I will tell you about something that happened years and years ago in my native country."

I nodded, because I would not let my eagerness betray me by my words; true, I should have preferred to hear his own story, but I had a vague hope he would speak of something nearest his heart, and I should catch a glimpse of his calamity through the chinks of his parable.

"His father was the richest man in Kadaan," Solomon began without ado; "he kept a drink-shop, and as it stood a few hundred yards away from the village

out upon the open road, it was the nearest to the farmers and the dealers coming from up-country to the market-town beyond, and the last on their return way till they again reached Trenka, which is the village before Kadaan; and this circumstance had a great influence on the custom of the tavern. Favish, the son—the man of whom I am telling you—served at the bar, but he did not like the occupation. The strange, bold faces he saw across the counter frightened him. He was much more comfortable in his little garret, trying to blow its roof off with his cornet. When he was a boy of twelve, his uncle had brought him a little tin trumpet, and that determined his vocation in life—a klesmer, a musician, he would be, and nothing else. By the time he left boyhood he was already an expert, and in great demand at all the festivities in the neighborhood. By now he was quite a man, as reserved as ever, seeking his own company, plain-featured and clumsy, but ready to give his heart's blood for those he loved.

"One day Chananya, the glazier-huckster from Uldrodno,—who, by the way, was also district scavenger, because he picked up everything nobody else would lay hands on,—came to Favish's father.

"'Mendel,' he said, with his wheezy chuckle, 'your son—may he live to be a hundred—is nearly four and twenty. It is time he had his own home and hearth, like a good Yehudi.'

"'Well, that has nothing to do with you,' said Mendel, gruffly. He did not like holding a long conversation with Chananya—it was almost a degradation for a respectable householder to speak to him.

"'Why not?' asked the other. 'He must marry, for the glory of the congregation—and besides, I have found him a bride.'

"'And who is she?' asked Mendel, smiling in spite of himself at the absurd idea.

"'My daughter,' answered Chananya, hardily, "as fine and respectable a girl as——'

"But here Mendel flew in a terrible rage.

"'What! you old carrion-flayer, you with your half-bred hussy of a daughter, you want to get hold of my Favish? Some evil spirit has driven you out of your senses. Go home and pray God that you may be restored. My son for your daughter!'

"'And why not?' persisted Chananya. 'My daughter is good and respectable.'

"'Good and respectable!' shouted Mendel. 'What do people say of her—how many times has she run away from you?'

"'She was starving with hunger and cold, and when I came home, and brought no money, she went away, because we could not bear to look upon each other's misery,' said Chananya, whiningly yet glibly.

"'And where did she go to when she went away?' jeered Mendel.

"'I don't know,' said Chananya, 'but the spirit of the Lord is on all her ways.'

"'Then may the spirit of the Lord be a thousand miles hence,' cried Mendel, rendered profane by his exasperation.

"'Well, we shall see, Mendel—we shall see,' said Chananya, quietly, as he lifted his satchel, and hobbled off.

"And the old schemer knew what he was saying. About a week afterwards, towards afternoon time, when the tavern was most crowded, and Favish had to help at the bar, Chananya came in—and not alone. He brought his daughter with him; she was holding him up by the arm, because he pretended to have fallen lame, and that was his excuse for taking the girl with him on his rounds. And what a strange pair they made! No one would have guessed that they were trunk and branch: she, lissome as a withe and fresh as a myrtle; he, gnarled and bent and shrunken like a sapless bramble-stock. And then their faces—one was tempted to gaze long at the distorted grimace of the old man, to give oneself the luxury of the contrast. For Yenta's face was like a summer storm, terrible in its beauty. The hair was massed and black as the thunder-clouds, and her eyes could flash and strike hard as the lightning, and between the two arched the broad serene brow like the calm of the rainbow. And as she tripped in, modestly and demurely, trim in her ankle-long frock and neat apron, stepping daintily on the high-heeled morocco slippers, Mendel turned white to the tip of his nose, and cast an anxious, sidelong glance at Favish.

"'A glass of vodka—of your best,' said Chananya, throwing a silver rouble on the counter. Mendel obeyed without a word, and Chananya stood there, with his daughter beside him, leisurely sipping his beverage, instead of tossing it down as usual, for he could toss vodka with the best of them. Mendel kept furtively watching Favish; the young man looked terribly disconcerted, his hands seemed to be refusing him

service, for he dropped two glasses, and spilt half a gallon of fire-wine. And all the while Chananya stood sipping, fully conscious that every eye in the room was fixed on him and his daughter.

"'Make haste, Chananya,' Mendel burst out at last, half-mad with anxiety; 'don't you see you take up the room of the other customers?'

"'What of that?' answered Chananya, looking him full in the face. 'Have I not paid my money like the others, and have I not the right to drink my purchase fast or slow as pleases me?'

"'Well said, Melchizedek, or whatever your name is,' broke in Christopher Talka. He was the tallest man in the room, with a big red beard, and by trade he was a swine-dealer. 'Let the old man alone, Mendel; he can stay as long as he likes,' he continued, turning to the host. But everybody knew what Christopher meant—it was Yenta, not her father, whom he defended. Many a time he had kicked and hustled some way-worn peddler out of the room, with the words: 'Go and make hay for your cow and calves at home, and leave drinking to your betters.'

"'Let us go, father,' said Yenta, gently, while shooting a quick glance at Christopher; 'do not let us be the cause of quarrel. If these men are inhospitable, God will provide us other shelter.'

"Chananya turned grumblingly; he knew he was the hero of the hour, and he wanted to enjoy his triumph over Mendel a little longer. But still, Favish had seen Yenta, and that was the principal thing. So they went away, and all across the courtyard Favish's eyes followed them; but at the corner Yenta turned and

smiled at him—yes, unmistakably at him. Then they disappeared, and Favish thought that the dark had set in early that day, and his legs tottered under him as if all the sinews had snapped.

"That is how the mischief began. From that day Favish was a changed man, and his father looked upon him sorrowfully, for he divined the reason of Favish's pale cheeks, and he cursed Chananya from top to toe for the evil he had brought on his boy. For Favish neither ate nor slept, but all day long he loitered about the high-road looking towards Uldrodno, as though he were expecting some one to come from there. At first he still toyed a little with his cornet, but that ceased, too, and the house lay desolate with the silent misery of its two occupants; for it was two years now since Chavah, the faithful wife and mother, had been carried out of it, feet foremost. For several weeks things went on thus, while Favish was wasting to a skeleton; but still Mendel said nothing, because he thought the evil would die of the disease of time.

"But Favish came to him one day, laid his head on his father's shoulder, and burst into tears.

"'Send for her, father, if thou wouldst have me live,' he sobbed. 'I have tried, but I can no more—send for her.'

"Mendel waited till he had gulped down his own tears. 'Son, dear son,' he said at last, 'conquer thyself. She is not for such as thou art; she will not make thee a good wife. Let her go her own way, and do thou go thine.'

"'I cannot, father,' whispered Favish; 'she haunts me; her face mocks me for my impotence, when I

endeavor to forget. Oh! I am so helpless, and the ache in my heart is killing me. Thou canst help me, father. Help me!'

"'I should be helping thee to thy own destruction,' said Mendel, despairingly.

"'I must have her, father, if it be for my destruction in this world and the next,' cried Favish. 'I have lost my health, my skill, everything that made life pleasant to me. Yesterday I tried to play my sorrow away, to be David to my own Saul, but an iron grip held me by the throat, and choked my breath. And so it will be as long as I live. Help me, father!'

"If it must be, Favish,' said Mendel, tremblingly, 'then let it be, in God's name. I will not see thee despair, if thou hast made me thy hope. Besides, shall I play Providence to any man?'

"At these words Favish started up with a cry of joy, seized his father's hands, and kissed them again and again. Then it was settled that Mendel should go to Chananya on the morrow, and talk things over. What passed between them and what terms and conditions of marriage they arrived at, Favish never knew, nor did he care in the fulness of his joy. The face of Mendel, when he returned with the news of Chananya's approval, was not that of a messenger of glad tidings; the furrows in his forehead had deepened, and his hair was perhaps a tinge whiter. But Favish saw nothing, and the first time he held Yenta in his arms he felt a giant's strength come over him, and was certain that no human evils could make part of his fate.

"The news of the marriage created a great stir in the neighborhood; and when the first wave of astonish-

ment had settled down, every now and then another gossip came, shaking his head and talking under his breath to Mendel. And the usual conclusion to what they had to tell was, 'Do not take it ill, Mendel; I speak to you as a friend.'

"To one and all of them Mendel listened quietly, and at the end he replied, 'I will not believe anything. My son loves her, and soon she will be as flesh of my flesh. For the honor of my son, and for my own honor, I will not believe anything to her shame; and now go in peace.'

"And whether Mendel's rebuke offended them, or whether there was some other reason, few of his friends attended the wedding, and on Chananya's side not so much as a dog turned up to do him honor in his hour of joy. But guests or no guests, Yenta was Favish's wife irrevocably, and the weal and woe of one was the weal and woe of the other.

"For some time it seemed as though the raven-croak of the gossips and Mendel's misgivings were doomed to disappointment. Yenta was a model housewife, and her husband did not find her wanting in the matter of wifely affection. Old Chananya kept himself scarce, and on the rare occasions when he came to the hostel, he was quite respectable. They had found him a decent lodging, and as he had no longer need to beg or to perform antics in the huts of wood-choppers and glass-blowers—for he had been a clown in his younger days—in return for a night's shelter, he had managed to acquire some self-respect. True, it sat on him like an ill-fitting second-hand coat, but it was there. Favish was in high spirits. He improved wonderfully in his

art now that he had somebody besides himself to work for; and in the meantime the business of the tavern prospered and throve, for the fame of the beautiful hostess spread over the country around, and a good many did not mind going a little out of their way to get a glimpse of her. Old Mendel went about in a dream, and held his breath, for fear of an evil eye.

"It was about a year after the marriage that a strange thing happened. Mendel and Favish had gone over to Trenka to see about a new supply of drink-stuff for the shop. They made their bargain, and, returning, found a lift on a corn-wagon, which brought them home an hour earlier. And as they entered the courtyard, they saw, sitting at one table, Yenta and Christopher Talka, the swine-dealer; and as neither of them was deaf, there was no need for them to have their heads so close together. Two full glasses were on the table, and Yenta was spreading a pack of cards one by one.

"Favish gave a gasp, and stood still at the door, and Talka scrambled hastily to his feet, almost upsetting the table in extricating his long legs. Yenta kept a smiling countenance.

"'Talka asked me to tell him his fortune,' she said, looking at Favish without wincing. Favish answered not a word, but passed on into the stables. Mendel's, however, was the wisdom of maturer years; he saw it was a case where silence would speak the loudest, so, despite the quaking of his heart, he forced a jest to his lips.

"'What! a big fellow like you, Christopher, afraid of a hare that has run across your path?'

"Talka twisted and turned awkwardly from side to side.

"'Mere pastime,' he mumbled, 'mere pastime;' and with a sheepish laugh he edged out by the door.

"All during the rest of the day father and son avoided each other. Perhaps they were afraid of reading the confirmation of some nameless dread in each other's face. Yenta went about her duties unconcernedly; she seemed ignorant that anything uncommon had happened, and Favish did not tell her.

"But she soon made it apparent that things were not with her as they had been; she became peevish and uneven in her temper, and her husband did not always know what answer he might expect. Sometimes she was moody and thoughtful, and at others uproariously merry. But her laugh was not pleasant to hear; it was loud and strident, almost like a shriek, and occasioned by things that ought to have made her blush in her husband's presence. For she busied herself more and more with the customers, and took a great interest in their affairs. So the reserve which her prim, quiet demeanor had at first kept up began to wear off, and the fault was none but hers. Was it seemly that she should stand leaning on both elbows across the counter, drinking with the peasants, and mixing in their talk? And if, now and then, one caught her by the hand, she did not draw it away in anger, as a well-behaved matron should have done. Talka was invisible for a month or so; then he started to come again, at first rarely, then more often, till that flaring red beard of his was the most familiar sight in the public room. Chananya, too, became a more frequent visitor, and each time he

brought a new rent in his coat and a more unquenchable thirst. There he would sit, with a besotted look in his eyes, till he was drunk, and then he got on the table, the empty bottle in hand, and danced the Cossack dance; and Yenta's laughter rang louder than all the others, louder even than Talka's. Mendel turned white as death, and Favish said nothing, but went out into the stables. More and more the control of things passed out of their hands. Yenta did all the business, kept the accounts and the money, and doled it out to them grudgingly, as one does to strangers.

"'Make an end of it, Favish,' said Mendel one day, brokenly. 'Tell her that Chananya and—and the swine-dealer must not come to the house any more, or I shall not survive it.'

"'Yes, father,' answered Favish, looking away; 'I shall tell her—I shall tell her of it to-morrow.' And to-morrow came, and still he did not tell her; and again it was to-morrow, and always to-morrow. For, whenever he looked at his wife, his accursed love for her mastered him, and held him tongue-tied. And so Talka flaunted his red beard more overbearingly than ever, and Chananya drank and drank till he fell under the table, or wallowed in the passage snoring off his drunkenness, while the peasants kicked and trod and spat upon him as they passed in and out. And Yenta saw it and laughed. Mendel saw it, too, but with failing eyes, and perhaps he would have cried, had not his heart been beating too faintly to stir him to tears. And one morning it had ceased to beat altogether. Favish raved with grief; yet, through it all, strange to say, a vague feeling of relief came over him. He was alone

now—there was nobody standing by to count every leap and quiver of his heart; and his pain was less, because it was not doubled by agonizing that other loving breast. And at least he was now secured against that terrible 'Make an end of it, Favish,' for the loving tongue that had uttered it was now silent for ever. Favish was very patient; he had faith in the goodness and fitness of things, and the day would arrive when Yenta would come to him unasked, and bring him the love a wife should bring her husband.

"And so he waited, and for a whole year nothing happened, except that Yenta's face more and more often wore a red flush, and that she became a great expert in all games of cards. Talka went in and out as usual, and brought her mysterious packets, the contents of which Favish was never told. The only important event before things came to a finish was that Chananya was found one day at the bottom of a fox-pit with his neck broken. And that was the end of Chananya. Yenta did not trouble to observe the week of mourning.

"It was the Sabbath after Chananya's funeral. For the first time since many months Yenta had stood by to hold the candle, while Favish was saying the Sabbath evening blessings on the ensuing week; and afterwards she had gone up to him and had stooped—for she was much taller than he—to kiss him. Favish did not know what was happening, and as he went up to his room to fetch his cornet, he had to grope his way, for the tears of happiness were blinding him. At last it had come, all that for which he had hoped and waited and suffered. That night he had to go to Trenka to

play at a wedding feast; for, as is usual in that part of the country, the marriage had taken place on the Friday, and the feast was left for the following Sabbath evening. Favish cursed his fate at having to leave home, but he had promised. And as he walked along the road, all ablaze with the silver of the full moon, he was almost glad to be alone with his happy thoughts. Half-way along he heard cries, and the trampling of beasts, and when they came nearer, he saw it was Talka driving with voice and whip a herd of swine in close tether. As he saw Favish, he became quiet, and tried to hasten the beasts by a shower of blows.

"'Where are you going, Talka?' asked Favish, with a sudden dread shooting through him.

"'I must hasten on to Slonim,' answered Talka. 'I want to get there by midnight, so as to give my beasts a rest, and make them look fit for to-morrow's market—we have already come a long way.'

"Favish looked at him; but Talka seemed to speak the truth: his face was red and heated, and the hoofs of the swine were trodden to the blood, for a red trail stretched in the direction from which they came.

"Favish reached Trenka in another hour; and when he came there, there was to be no wedding feast after all; either the cook had let the dishes burn, or the bridegroom had run away overnight—something had happened to stop the proceedings. Favish was very pleased; he saw in it a good sign, and he turned back without a word of chiding for having been made to come a fool's errand. The ground flew under his feet, for his heart was light, and his step was light, and before he knew it, he saw the palisade fence that hedged

the tavern on one side gleam white in the distance. And as he came nearer, he heard voices floating through the still summer night—voices that he knew, for at the sound a leaden weight hung itself upon his feet, and, dropping on his hands, he crawled to the edge of the enclosure. At the gate stood Yenta, with her thick hair falling like a mantle around her shoulders, and one of her hands in Talka's; the herd of swine lay around them in dead weariness.

"'And so it will be to-morrow?' Talka was saying, gazing in Yenta's eyes. 'Thou hast kept me long enough.'

"'I could not come before this, Christopher,' replied Yenta. 'There was father—after all, he was my father, and if I went away, he would be cast out upon the streets, and I could not let that be done.'

"'Very well, sweetheart, so be it then,' said Talka, 'I shall come to-morrow night, and take thee away; and listen, dear, get ready whatever there is, the roubles and that gold beaker and the silver candlesticks—the broad-nosed Jew, what does he want them for?—and then we shall go far away, to my home in Croatia, and thou shalt eat swine flesh to thy heart's content. Didst thou like the bacon I brought thee?'

"'I liked it, but I like thy kisses better, Christopher,' she said. 'I tried to kiss him to-night, in order to allay his suspicions, and I have a taste on my lips as if I had been eating crab apples—kiss me hard, Christopher,' and she stretched out her mouth to meet his.

"Favish listened and looked; then life came back to his limbs—if his ears had been dishonored, his eyes were not to be dishonored, too; and so, quick as light-

ning, he snatched up his cornet, set it to his mouth, and blew. And he blew as no man on earth had done before, or will do after him; and perhaps the sound of the trump of judgment will ring out like that. At first it was like the whining of a wolf's cub, then it swelled like the distant thunder on the hills, and at last it rose like the shriek of Satan, when he tried to force his way into Paradise, and got his knee jammed in the gateway. At the sound Talka started up with a yell, and ran—and ran as fast as he could waddle on his fat haunches. And, despite everything, Favish had to throw down his cornet and lean against the fence, for the maniac laughter that shook him threatened to burst his sides. Then he strode towards Yenta. She had been standing there, white and motionless as a pillar of salt; and near her Favish saw something glittering on the ground—it was Talka's butcher-knife, which he had dropped as he scampered off; it was long, and turned up to a point at the end like his own impudent nose; nor was it straight and square like those which our licensed slaughterers use. Favish picked it up, and stood before his wife.

"'So thou eatest the flesh of swine?' he asked.

"She looked at him, but even her eyes had lost their power of speech.

"'Then I shall give thee a feast, such as thou never hadst in all thy days,' he screamed, and threw himself on the herd of swine, and hacked and slashed and sliced among them—wherever his knife plunged; and he shrieked with laughter to see the quivering carcasses and the helpless struggles of those that survived to break away from the tether. And each time he struck a more

murderous blow, or made a more deadly gash, he cried, 'So much for thee, friend Talka.' Now and then he looked round to see whether Yenta was standing where he had left her. And when he had finished, he went up to her, twined his hand in her hair, and dragged her along towards the slaughtered swine.

"'Eat, eat,' he shouted, 'there is enough and to spare,' and with one push he sent her staggering on to the heaving, tossing flesh-mountain. Then, without another look or word, he went out into the night."

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Solomon ceased, and his head fell heavily on his breast. I dared not look at him.

"And what became of Favish?" I whispered.

"What became of Favish?" he repeated. "He exchanged with a conscript, went to the war, and was taken prisoner in the trenches of Sebastopol while trying to blow up the English powder magazine."

HINDELAH'S CLOTHES-PROP

THE household of Kolba Klamm, of Yarotsin, consisted of himself, his wife Esther, his little boy David, and the drink-devil, who was Kolba's own private familiar. The last was by far the most important member of the household, and took up the most room, which is the custom of drink-devils, especially of those who endenizen themselves in homes of small girth and compass. And the way in which he had obtained the right of residence in Kolba's house was as follows.

Years before Kolba married he was by profession a carter of turf and timber to the town. He used to go with his conveyance to the hill forest of Kastivitch, ten miles up, buy his cartload, and drive back to Yarotsin. The way between the two places goes along a strip of high table-land, on the right of which a bleak, steep wall of slate rock rises massively, whereas the left slopes abruptly to the plains below. And so, when Kolba drove his vehicle along the road in winter, he had the full benefit of the keen-edged frost-wind butting itself headlong against the rock barrier that impeded its onward course. And with every blast Kolba felt himself cut in halves. Many a time when he arrived back in town, he had to be lifted down, stiff as one of his own logs, and then he lay before the fire till he thawed himself back into life. And so the idea gained hold of him to take a little fire along with him on his journeys, if it was only the liquid fire that

goes by the name of vodka. The new departure turned out a great success—that is, for the immediate purpose in hand. When Kolba sat on his box-seat, and heard the merciless wind whistling about his ears, while the cold was nibbling with a thousand needle-like teeth at his toes and finger tips, he merely had recourse to his bottle, and immediately he felt as if he had lit a blazing furnace inside him, which sent its flames undulating through the length and breadth of his body. And when the blaze flagged, he poured down a little more fuel, chuckling to himself, and thinking what a clever fellow he was thus effectively to foil the malice of the elements. And, curiously enough, when the summer came, and the sun was a huge armory from which red-hot spears and javelins hurtled down on the hapless wayfarer, Kolba became scientific, went in for homœopathic notions, and kept on with his vodka, because he fancied it acted as a refrigerating medium. And so all the year round the furnace inside him was ablaze, and in it was generated the above-mentioned drink-devil, in the same way that salamanders are manufactured, according to the statistics of the "Go-and-See-Book," by incessantly fuelling a smelting oven for seven years and a day. The only good the drink-devil did Kolba was to preserve his life, by keeping the horses in the straight road and thus from sliding down the precipice on the left, two hundred feet to the bottom, while their charioteer lay snoring on his seat. And so it was that Kolba had now to be lifted from off the wagon both in summer and in winter, and whereas before he had met with much sympathy and commiseration, he now began to

be looked upon as a mangy sheep, which might spread contagion among the flock.

Consequently, when he made up his mind to settle down, and wanted some one to preside over his homestead, it was but natural that the scope of his choice should be restricted. Not that he thought it worth while to grow grey hairs over that, because his choice had been made long ago, with the consent of the chosen party, and when Esther had finished her contracted years of service in the house of Rabbi Myer, the ecclesiastic head of Yarotsin, she at once fulfilled her next contract, which was to throw in her lot with Kolba's. The only stipulation she had made was that Kolba should give up his open-air occupation, and follow a calling where a man is not thrown so much on the society of a wagon, two dray horses, and a bottle of vodka. And so Kolba took again to the shoemaker's craft, of which he was master, and which he had discarded from a feeling of false shame at its humbleness and the restraint it imposed on him. Kolba humored his wife, because by that time he had become tolerably indifferent to notions of pride and liberty, and in his sober moments he sat at his last, and made a living, or would have made one, if the drink-devil had not proved so great a discount on the family resources.

No, Esther's plan did not work; the evil passion had engrafted itself too deeply on Kolba's system, and required more than a mere change of occupation to extirpate it. But what she thought of it all, and whether she regretted her marriage, and upbraided her adverse destiny, no one ever knew. Esther refused at

all costs to be pitied. Kolba was entirely her own business; if he suited her, he would have to suit every one else. There was no other course in the matter. Homes for inebriates and such-like luxuries of civilization are unknown in that part of the world. The afflicted are allowed to die of *delirium tremens*, or paralysis, or spontaneous combustion—it is so much cheaper and healthier for every one concerned. Only once, and then with very good reason, Esther had made a confidant; it was when Benjamin Gatzel, the local Marshallik's son, came home for a week after finishing his studies at Charkov University, and his own parents did not recognize him behind his gold-rimmed *pince-nez* and under his appellation of Dr. Berthold Sonnenthal; it was then that Esther had gone to him and entreated him, for the sake of all he held dear in this world, and all he hoped for in the next, and for the sake of the days when they had been playmates together, to cure her husband, inasmuch as the fame of the doctor's cleverness in these things had spread to the ends of the earth.

Dr. Berthold Sonnenthal had looked at her very seriously, and had said: "My good woman, nothing but a violent shock to the cerebral nerve-system has been known to effect a radical reaction in these cases. If I had the necessary apparatus at my disposal here, I might experiment on him, but——" And the doctor shrugged his shoulders in a way which doctors have, when they think they have said enough to say everything.

And Esther had gone away, feeling very vague in her mind as to what the learned professor meant by

the long words in pure high German, and knowing for certain that all she could do now was to redouble her supplications to the Healer of all disorders, who has His remedies always ready to hand.

It was on festivals and days of rejoicing that Esther felt her lot sorest, when she saw the light and gladness in other dwellings, and knew that her own was darkened by the shadow of an unspeakable sorrow, despite the air of unconcern she gave herself—an air that cost her so much striving and wrestling of soul, and that merely irritated the neighbors. If the calendar had only contained more fasts and other national anniversaries of tribulation, the strain of living would not have been so tense, because there would have been less occasion for her to do violence to her feelings. And just now it was Purim, the holiday in honor of her namesake, Esther, the Queen.

Kolba and little David were sitting in the synagogue, which was crammed with a large congregation on the morning of the festival. Right at the rear sat the two, almost elbowing the professional beggars, and David wondered in his heart why his father was content to rub shoulders with the riffraff of the town instead of taking his place among the respectable house-masters. He would have asked his father, only the latter was so deep in thought, staring before him with a far-off look in his eyes, and seemingly unconscious of all around. And, indeed, Kolba was musing on many things, so intent on his meditations that he had lost the place in the reading of the Megillah, the Record Book of the great deliverance in the days of Ahasuerus. His scroll lay before him, almost where

he had unrolled it, and the voice of the Reader, intoning the stirring events of the great historical drama in the city of Shushan, fell unheeded on his ears. Kolba mused—he was thinking what a wreck he had made of his life, and how he might have fashioned it far otherwise. He was wondering what had become of the good resolutions, the virtuous intentions he had manufactured in such quantities at the time of his marriage, when he thought he had fairly and finally settled accounts with the past; and then he remembered that they were still there, all of them, only they were waiting for their accomplishing, and the past was still the present. Was it then so impossible for him to make one firm stand against the insidious enemy that was stealthily—nay, no longer stealthily—undermining him, his home, his heart's dearest and best? God knew he had tried and failed, had tried again, failed again, till it had become patent to his quailing heart that he was doomed, and that it was a destiny of his own doing that now undid him. What caused him to think of these things, now of all times? The sight of the scroll before him. To-day eight years ago his bride had given it to him, the only heirloom testifying to the departed greatness of her house, which traced its descent from Jacob Elchanan, the great Cabbalist and wonder-worker. And Esther had given him the scroll without waiting till, as her husband, he might take lawful possession of it, because, as she said, it contained her name so many times, and might act as a charm against his forgetting it. And he had sworn to her that he would make her a life which, for happiness, all the queens of the

world, living or dead, would look on with envy. What a perjurer he had been—what a traitor to himself and to her. And that was the deepest humiliation of all—it was left to his own heart to reproach him; the rebuke would never come from her lips. Any other wife would long ago have slammed the door in his face, and have preferred the chance of starving. She, she would suffer, keep silent, and die.

He looked curiously at the scroll. It was so long since he had looked at it, and given it a serious thought. It embodied so many things—a new chance in life a merciful Providence had offered him, a happiness that might have been, a thousand regrets, a world of impotent despair—it was the cemetery of all these. That made it worth looking at close enough to see that the blue silk which lined it at the back was getting faded—it was the same silk with which Esther had edged the corners of his prayer-shawl, and of which her wedding dress had been made. The wedding dress had long ceased to exist, but he remembered it now, as he remembered so many other things—his little David, for instance, with his wan cheeks and big, patient eyes, which sometimes made his father tremble when they were fixed on him with their questioning look; and just then it struck Kolba that one day the dumb question would be spoken, and would have to be answered. And Kolba thought it was time to provide for that day, so that he might be able to give an account of himself. Well, he would start to make provision at once. He ground his teeth, for he knew what this undertaking meant; he knew he would have to go through a great deal more grinding of teeth

before it would be at length achieved. He would battle with the malignant demon inside him, he would exorcise him, he would rid himself of his tyranny, though the revolt would shorten his life by half its span. And this time, with the help of God, the questioning eyes of his little son and his martyr-wife, with the help of the silk-lined scroll—this time he would succeed.

Kolba looked up; the cantillation of the Megillah had come up to the enumerating of the ten sons of Haman, which must be read in one gulp, and leaves the Reader choking and breathless—to symbolize, no doubt, the state of the sons of Haman when Mordecai and the children of Israel had finished with them. And before Kolba could realize the rapid lapse of the time, the congregation was rising, doffing the paraphernalia of prayer, and sallying out.

"May I carry the Megillah?" asked little David, timidly.

Kolba nodded assent, and David gleefully laid hold of the scroll, rolled it up tight, and placed it in his doublet; it was such a pretty plaything, and he was allowed to handle it but one day in the year.

Kolba walked on with hanging head and in pensive silence. He had a task before him at which he was no adept, and which required careful preparation. Esther had just finished setting the breakfast things on the table when her husband entered, alone, because David had remained behind to exhibit his beautiful scroll to every one whom he could inveigle into bestowing a glance on it. Kolba had still not determined on his plan, and so, to save himself further racking of

brain, he went up to his wife and kissed her twice on the mouth.

"It is our wedding day," he explained awkwardly, interpreting her look.

"To be sure—I had forgotten," she answered quietly.

"I thought I had given you enough cause to remember it," said Kolba, in a husky tone.

Esther looked at him in doubt. Was it a taunt or a regret he had uttered? His next words told her.

"Esther," he said, casting down his eyes, "I have made a heap of ashes out of your young life. No wonder you do not care to think of the cursed day that gave me the power to do it."

"I have not cursed the day," said Esther, seeking his eyes, which avoided hers; "it was a day like any other that God gives, bearing in its womb good and evil."

"Then you must curse me, because I was the evil that it bore you," said Kolba.

Esther looked at him in wonder. Never before, or at least not for a long time, had his words contained that ring of contrition. What did it mean?

"Kolba," she said, "I have never opened my lips in ill speech against you, whether in your hearing or out of it. I have borne with you. I shall bear with you as long as I have strength. It is not my affliction I grieve for, it is yours."

"Because in mine you have already sufficient cause for sorrow, you mean. Esther, you shall not sorrow any more."

Esther felt a sudden thrill of fear. "Shall you divorce me?" she asked.

Kolba laughed—almost a happy laugh. "What put that thought into your head?" And then his voice took a sharp turn of apprehension, and he went on: "Unless you desire it?"

She shook her head. "Did I not say I would bear with you?" she said.

"And you shall find it easy," said Kolba, putting all his soul into his words. "A resolve came to me to-day—straight from heaven it must have come, for I feel that with it there has been given me the endurance to make it good. Esther, you know what I mean, your tribulation is ended."

Esther hung her head. Was that all? Kolba had merely made another promise that he would turn over a new leaf, and eschew temptation. Ah, she knew his promises! What was the use of buoying herself up with an empty hope, and storing up for herself another and speedy disappointment? Kolba read the doubts of her heart.

"Nay, Esther, I do not ask you to believe me; only look on, and see. And yet," he continued tremulously, "it would help me if you believed, only a little, that I could help myself. It would make me doubly strong."

"How can I trust you?" almost wailed Esther, twining her fingers convulsively. "One of these days I shall trust too surely, and you will deceive me, and my heart will break."

"But you shall not again be deceived," cried Kolba, hoarsely, stretching out his shaking hand for hers,

"you shall not, Esther; what would you have me swear by? Ah!" his face lit up as the door opened, and David bounded in. "Do you see, Esther," he went on exultantly, "God has shown me whereby to make my oath—by his life!" And he laid his hand on David's head, as though it were an altar.

The boy looked up wonderingly into the faces of his parents, but he could make nothing of them, and he was too frightened to ask. He only saw his mother nodding her head in silence and big tears welling into her eyes. And when his father and he were sitting at breakfast, David wondered still more, for though the tears were still glittering in his mother's eyes, she moved about so briskly, with such a springing step, and so joyous a smile on her face. And that was a new thing to him, for he had watched her weeping at other times, and then she had sat with tight-drawn lips, rigid as a statue of stone, and gazing blindly into space. And somehow he felt so much happier to see her weep in this fashion, and the dry, coarse bread he was eating tasted as though it had an inch-thick layer of honey upon it.

Presently Kolba got up, and said to his wife, a little shamefacedly and with subdued voice: "We are making a poor festival of this day; and the fault is not yours, Esther. There was no need for us to be up to our neck in poverty."

"I am rich, in riches that pass all counting," returned Esther; "there was more gold in the words you spoke to me than is in all the world's treasuries, and that makes me content with my poor estate."

"That is neither here nor there," said Kolba,

cheerily; "this is a day which must be celebrated in all due honor."

"Would that we could—but how?" asked Esther.

"Leave that to me, incredulous one," smiled Kolba, stroking her cheek; "I am going up to the Big House to ask payment for the pair of riding-boots I made for the farmer. At noon to-day I was to come—I am belated already. I shall go forthwith and return quickly."

A great fear rose in Esther's bosom: Kolba would have money at his disposal—much money, for in his better moments he was a skilful workman, and people paid him well. And this would be the first trial his determination would encounter.

"Let me go with you," was on her lips; but she checked the words. Had he not asked her to believe him, and was she to let him think that her faith in him did not reach beyond the threshold of their dwelling? That would only defeat her own ends.

And so Kolba went alone to the Big House, where the farmer dwelt, got the six roubles, the stipulated price, and started on his way back. He was going to take home all that was needed for the feasting—a pound of calf-liver, almonds and raisins, flour and sugar for the fritters, and all the other delicacies that were the order of the day. But nothing to drink—not a thimbleful; that was why he was making the long *détour* to avoid the drink-shop at the outskirts of the town, and . . . what was the meaning of this—was it his evil genius that had befooled him so? For here he was right before the tavern—a dozen steps would take him to the door, and the voices of the

roysterers inside could be heard quite clearly. Kolba's heart grew bigger and bigger in his bosom, and thumped like a sledge-hammer; the dew of fear stood in thick drops on his forehead, and he could feel himself growing white as chalk. With a tremendous wrench he tore himself from the spot, staggered a few paces with tottering knees, and just as he was about to take the first long stride that would bring him into safety, he heard a shout of some one calling him by name. He tried to lift his hands in order to stop his ears, but he seemed to have no arms, and the sleeves of his coat were hanging empty; and soon another voice joined the first in calling him, and then another, until a dozen throats were shouting: "Kolba, come and drink with us!"

Like a hunted deer he gazed at the faces thronging the window of the tavern and at the hands that beckoned him on. He knew these men; they were Chassidim, whose prototypes were the Pharisees of old, and who believe in a religion made up of long caftans, broad waist-girdles, and love-locks, and play antics generally with the grand old faith of Sinai.

"Come, Kolba, let us see how you can drink," called one of them.

A wild rage came over Kolba at these words; so that was to what he had sunk—to make sport for these madmen in their drunkenness. But his anger was not so much against the men as against himself, for the impotence to resist that was creeping over him, and he prayed that God might either send the prophet Elijah quickly to bear him out of temptation in his chariot, or to strike him dead in the instant. So he stood there

shaking his head in idiotic fashion, and mechanically the words came from him: "No, no, I have left off drinking. I told Esther so."

"Nonsense, Kolba," cried another, "you are only beginning; you are quite young yet; if you go on drinking till you are eighty, you will live to be an old man."

Kolba listened in silence to the jeering, and only went on shaking his head. That exasperated the Pietists; Kolba's refusal was a distinct breach of the observances of the day.

"Heathen, apostate, abomination!" rang from all lips. But above all the rest was heard the voice of humpback Issar, the most rabid and fanatical of them all.

"Do you not know that it is an obligation on us to drink and be drunk this Purim Day till one cannot distinguish between Haman and Mordecai? Gentile! Do you want to bring ruin on the congregation by your irreverence?"

A trembling like that of ague seized Kolba; he felt the iron chains with which he had fettered his desire were snapping one by one, and that presently, if no help came, his evil instinct would break out and bear everything before it. "God, if not on me, have mercy on my wife and child," he prayed with his last remaining strength.

Issar watched him, fuming. "Oh, I have it," he muttered to himself. Quickly he snatched up a glass of liquor, and held it out of the window.

"Look, Kolba," he shouted, "the best grog ever brewed; look at the vapor of it—like the incense of myrrh!"

Kolba looked and the odor of the beverage came wafted to him, and drew him on with unseen tentacles, as the scent of blood draws on the wild beast. A heave and a tremor shook him from head to foot; he cast a mad, frightened look to where he knew his wife Esther was waiting for him in their dwelling, and with a groan that to his own ears was like the groan of his good angel writhing in mortal torment, he flung himself through the open door of the tavern, knowing that it was as the entrance to a living grave.

Kolba was right; Esther was, indeed, waiting anxiously for his return, listening for the sound of his footsteps, with her heart in her ears. David was keeping her company, and had just finished blunting his dinner appetite by continuing on the scraps left over from breakfast. After that he sat musing for a while.

"It is just a year ago," was the upshot of his ruminations.

"What is?" asked Esther.

"Don't you remember? I mean when father came home, took the beautiful suet-cake and the Haman's-hats you had prepared, and dashed them on the floor, and afterwards poured the beet-root soup out of the window, although you had taken three eggs to make it mellow. Why did he do that? You would never tell me when I asked."

Esther's hand fluttered to her heart. "Because it is not good that little folks should ask questions except at the Passover table," she said with a wan smile; "still, this time I shall answer you. It was a jest of your father's—nothing more. You know it is lawful to play jests on one another on Purim feast."

"But that was a jest to weep over, not to laugh at," said David with a pout; "I hope father won't take it into his head to jest like that to-day. It makes me hungry again merely to think of it."

"His mind is not bent on jests to-day," said Esther; "he was very serious this morning."

But despite her reassuring words, Esther felt a shiver of doubt. Had Kolba been really serious? She dared not think, she could only hope, and go on praying for it.

Little David had fallen back into his reverie.

"And then there is another thing, mother," he blurted out suddenly, "it is quite a long story, and it happened about two months ago. You had sent me up to bed, as you always do when you are waiting up for father; but that night you had such a sad look on your face that I could not fall asleep for thinking of it. And then I heard father come in, and immediately he began to shout and stamp till I got frightened and crept downstairs to see what was the matter, and through the chink of the wall I saw father had one hand in your hair, and the other he had lifted up like this—as if to strike you on the face, and you were saying: 'Kolba, not that, not that—everything but that'; and then he let go, and crouched down in the corner, and sat weeping. And at that I got still more terrified, and quickly went back to bed, and pulled the coverlet over my ears. Was that another of father's jests?"

And the little fellow paused, out of breath with the hurry of his words, and sat anxiously gazing at his mother for an answer. But she sat gazing back at

him, with both hands to her heart this time, and at last she gasped: "What are you saying? You are mad; it is not what you saw, you only dreamt it, because you had not said your night-prayer properly." And then her voice broke, and with a sob she concluded: "Believe me, little son, it is not true, you only dreamt it."

David kept his lips tightly together, for fear they should frame another question—his questions received such strange answers. But Esther's heart was in a wild panic. So it was coming at last, what she had been trying to prevent, knowing it to be an impossible task—her son was beginning to find out things for himself. All through her troubles this had been her only consolation—her child was blessedly ignorant of the black shadow that spread its wings over their home. The thought which had that morning come to Kolba as an inspiration had been an ever-present incubus upon her mind. One day her son would stand before her and ask: "Woman, what is this thing you have given me for a father?" And she had often prayed that it might be at her graveside her son should ask that question. O God in Heaven, had Kolba been serious? If he had, why was he not back from his errand? It was two hours' journey to and from the Big House, and he had been gone three. But he might have had to wait, he might be chatting with an acquaintance, a thousand things might have happened to delay him; let it be ten thousand—only not that one.

So the afternoon wore on apace, it was three o'clock already, and Esther waited on, sometimes with a blank

heart and brain, and sometimes feeling she must burst with the fulness of her fear and impatience. But she did not show it by so much as the twitching of a muscle. She might have gone forth to meet him, to look for him, only she was too proud to let people know of her anxiety, and, moreover, it would have been an ill way of showing the faith and trust she had promised her husband. Suddenly her eyes fell on David, who sat there squirming with the restlessness of youth, and a thought struck her.

"Why do you not go out?" she asked.

"I am afraid to leave you—you look so lonely," said the seven-year-old sturdily.

"Then I shall tell you what you are to do; go here and there about the town, and make search for your father; but when you see him, don't say that I sent you, unless he asks—do you understand?"

David nodded, and jumped up merrily; after all his heart was as yet too small to have room for many troubles, and the sun was shining outside for all he was worth.

"What is that bulging in your doublet?" asked Esther.

"It is—it is only the Megillah Scroll," he said with a quaver; "I shall be so careful of it, mother." He was under great apprehension that she would take it from him, and replace it in its usual receptacle. But Esther only flushed with joy; it was a happy omen; under the auspices of this wedding-gift of hers, which she had tendered her bridegroom in love and hope and happiness, it was fitting that her son should thus go forth on the errand that would bring back to her the

promise of all these things, or annihilate them for ever.

So David sallied out into the balmy spring afternoon, feeling as proud of his mission as any ambassador sent to adjust the international interests of a continent. The secrecy which his mother had enjoined on him seemed to hint that there was need of great tact and diplomacy in the business. To scour the neighborhood for some one, and then, when you meet him, to pretend that the meeting was the result of quite a fortuitous conjuncture of circumstances, was a new experience to our emissary. And so, having determined to enjoy the situation to the utmost, he asked the first man he came across if by any chance he had seen his father. The man shook his head surlily, and passed on. Nothing daunted, David asked the second—in the little town everybody of course knew everybody else, and could give an account of his neighbor's genealogy back into dim generations. The second man took the question more kindly, going to the extent of shrugging his shoulders, and saying: "Better for you you had never been born."

That was a curious way of giving the desired information, thought David; the man must be mad to talk so absurdly. And then, laughing at his foolishness, he straightway accosted another passer-by. This one, at least, was a sensible man, and he told David that he would find his father in the hostel just outside the town. David made a sour face, because it meant a good hour's journey for him. Still, there was nothing to be done, so he pulled up his stockings, and set out with a stout heart. Presently he came to the fishing

weir, where the frogs used to sit and tell one another fairy tales in the cool of the summer evenings. There were no frogs about just then, but Grandmother Hindelah was washing what she called her clothes outside her little loam hut, two or three stones' throw from the pond. David was shocked—the wicked old woman, to be washing clothes on a festival, when no one thought of doing any work. No wonder the children called her the Machsheifah, the witch. Poor old Hindelah! If the youngsters only knew what the older folks knew, they would not hoot her, and bespatter her with mud when no grown-up is looking. Ever since her only son had been struck dead at her feet by the lightning, as they trudged home from the fair through the roaring storm, twenty years ago, the world had lost its shape and symmetry in her eyes; everything seemed topsy-turvy, and times and seasons were all jumbled up together. So how was she to know it was Purim, since no one took the trouble to tell her?

David stopped and watched her for a while at her task. Then his righteous indignation got the upper hand, and he called out: "Witch Hindelah, you will wash yourself into Gehennom for your sins."

The old woman worked on stolidly.

"Witch Hindelah, your hands will drop off your wrists, so that you can never wash any more," he called again.

There was still no answer, and then David became naughty, and his mind was filled with evil thoughts. He would show the witch what it was to treat him with contemptuous indifference. A few yards from him stood Hindelah's famous washing pole, rearing its

smooth-planed height to the heavens. It was famous for the mysterious affection which Hindelah bore it; not for love or money could any of the housewives procure its services on washing day. Hindelah guarded it zealously, and when she did not use it herself, it was stowed away safely in the wattle loft of her habitation. Hindelah had herself forgotten why it was so precious to her; only sometimes, in her clearer intervals, she connected it vaguely with her dead son. Probably it was he who had brought it home to her from the forest, and had trimmed and planed it so neatly; and this was all the legacy he had left his mother. But the thing that recommended it to the attention of the youngsters of the town was the beautiful two-pronged fork at the top, with which it gripped the clothes-line and steadied it in the strongest bluster of the north wind. With a strip of india-rubber tubing fastened to each prong it would make a splendid sling—as good as that wherewith David's namesake slew the giant Goliath. But Hindelah had suspicions of their base designs, and kept a sharp lookout when any of the marauders were in the neighborhood. David she was not much concerned about—he was too small and skinny to do harm to her treasure; and so, when she looked up, and saw him tugging the pole out of the ground with all the strength of his little arms, she set up a desperate yell, and came hobbling to the rescue, her eyes as big as saucers, and her face the color of purple. David quickly sprang back, and made off to a safe distance, for he had never seen the witch look so terrible; and there he stood laughing at her grimaces and the mien of impotent malice that contorted

her features. At last Hindelah found her breath again, and began to talk in short little gasps, which made David feel she was spitting her words in his face. And the louder he laughed the swifter and more confused grew her speech, and therefore David was astonished to hear himself catch the drift of one of her sentences quite distinctly.

"The prop, the prop, you shall have it upon a day, but more of it than you shall want," she mumbled.

This was getting uncanny, and David's laughter died on his lips, and he hurried away, casting back shy, anxious glances at Hindelah, who stood shaking her forefinger threateningly. And so he was very pleased, when, a little way further up, he came across a group of his schoolfellows, playing the game of odd and even with nuts, as is the custom of the day. David had no nuts with him, and so he had to stand by, and look on idly and curiously. Then, as the excitement of the gambling gained hold of him, he suddenly remembered that he had a ball of glazier's putty in his pocket, which might be negotiable for barter. So he went up to one of the boys, and made overtures.

"Simcha, give me twenty nuts for this."

Simcha, whose father was the treasurer of the congregation, looked him up and down, and answered: "In the first place I do not want to change my nuts for your putty, which you have stolen, and secondly, if you had a million nuts, I would not allow you to play with us."

David kept his temper, despite the false charge and the insolent rebuff.

"Why not, Simcha?" he asked quietly.

"Because your father is a drunkard, and beats your mother, and it is not becoming that respectable children should associate with the son of such a one."

"My father a drunkard—beats my mother?" echoed David, in blazing anger. "That is the last word you shall speak for a long time." And the next moment he had Simcha by the throat, and Simcha, who was an arrant coward, began to scream for help, although he stood a head taller than his adversary. And presently all the boys came rushing to Simcha's assistance, because a rich man's son has always more friends than a poor man's, and it would have gone hard with David, but just then a howl like that of a mad wolf rang out, and when the frightened children gazed in the direction whence it came, they saw a fearful thing bearing straight down upon them—its tongue lolling out of its mouth, its hair a bushy tangle about the face, and even at that distance they could see the eyes gleaming blood-red. But the greatest horror of all was that the monster brandished in its hand a long pole, which could be none other than Grandmother Hindelah's clothes-prop. However, they did not stop to make sure, but scampered off in wild pell-mell, shrieking and squeaking like a drove of suckling pigs under the lash of the driver.

David had been so busy throttling Simcha that he had no time for more than a moment's glance at the apparition, but when he saw the others take to their heels, he ran likewise, his only thought to escape the danger that came careering on behind him. Now, whether he had not sufficient start, or because his legs were shorter than those of the others, he gradually saw

himself lagging in the rear, completely outdistanced by his fellow-fugitives. And all the while the lumbering horror at his back was coming nearer and nearer —he could feel the ground tremble under its tread—he thought he already felt the tip of the pole in the small of his back, and with a sob of despair he thought that only one chance of safety remained to him—to swerve aside and let the pursuer race past him in the wake of the others, because if he came up with them, he would have more victims. So he suddenly took a sharp curve to the left, and a moment after he saw the monster lurch heavily past him with the impetus of its own weight, and already he was thanking God for his deliverance, when, horror of horrors, he heard the pursuing tread stop, recover itself, and veer off in the direction he was taking. Mad with fear, he staggered on, panting, his heart fluttering into his throat and back again with each pace he took, and already he could descry the first houses of the town; another minute or two, and some one would surely come along the road, and stop the murderous brute behind him—and the next moment he had stumbled over a gnarled root growing out of the ground, and lay sprawling on his back. Then he knew it was no use fighting against his destiny, and, struggling to his knees, he held up his clasped hands, not to pray for his life,—he could see that was useless,—but to be killed quickly, and be done with the horror of it. And before he could gather his wits fully, he saw the terrible face loom down upon him, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, for despite its awful aspect there was something strangely familiar about it; and then it flashed upon him—was it—could it be—ah, yes, it was his

father, and Simcha had been right, his father had gone mad with drink, and was about to kill his poor little son. This, then, was the meaning of Witch Hindelah's strange words; she had cursed him as he had deserved for making mock of a helpless old woman, and therefore he was now going to die by her clothes-prop. He looked at the cruel point into which it tapered off at the bottom end, charred and hardened in the fire—it was but a matter of moments before he would feel it go crashing through his chest, and, O God, he did not know how the prayer for the dying ran, the prayer without which no one could get into the Garden of Eden. He knew it was contained in his morning-prayer, but what it was, or how it began, had gone clean out of his memory. And then a thought struck him: surely, God would be satisfied if he died with any utterance of the sacred tongue on his lips—and quickly he pulled out the Scroll of the Megillah from his doublet, unrolled the first page, and began to read with quaking voice that halted and stumbled over the words, because they were written without the vowel points: "And it was in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who ruled from Houdu to Kush. . . ." High up he held the scroll, so as to hide from his sight the terrible face above, and so that he might not see the blow when it came, and read on meanwhile as fast as his half-palsied tongue could wag.

Kolba stood swaying from side to side, his weapon poised for the thrust, giving himself time to take steady aim. And then his eyes fell on the face of the figure crouching at his feet, and a malignant joy came into his heart. This was a great stroke of luck. Why, here was the goblin who had haunted his memory,

and had troubled his soul with vague, uneasy suggestions that he was doing somebody a great wrong, that he had done something that was foul and damnable—this was the goblin who had been always at his ear, and had whispered reproaches that made him feel angry with himself; but this was the last of him, he would pin him to the earth, and leave him there writhing, and be rid of him for ever. And just as he was drawing his arm back for a stronger lunge, he saw the goblin pull something from his bosom—something that was blue; did goblins as a rule carry strips of sky about with them? Or else, was there something wonderful and magical about this stretch of blue color that lay across Kolba's eyes? For somehow it made his senses clearer and steadier; he could look back into things that had happened before, and see them take definite shape to themselves; he could weigh words and actions; he could hear voices and see faces that he knew, and he became conscious that the voice and face before him belonged to some one, not to a goblin, but to some one the thought of whom ever made his heart beat with quickened throbs of gladness—and then with a final wrench his mind broke through the clouds and vapors of his drunken stupor, and he saw his son David holding up in his little hands the Megillah Scroll—the emblem of the glad and happy days which he had turned into days of mourning. And from him he glanced at the implement of murder in his hand, and the next moment it had clattered to the ground, and Kolba was on his knees straining David to his bosom, and crying amid sobs and laughter:

"By your life I had sworn the oath, and therefore

God was pitiful, and preserved you for a token that my oath was acceptable, and shall not be made void—by your life." . . . . He got no further, for a darkness swept over his eyes, and just then the men whom the tale of the terror-stricken children had sent in search of Kolba came up, and carried him home, while the swoon that had been sent him held him in its merciful embrace.

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Some years later, Dr. Berthold Sonnenthal, the famous pathologist, while lecturing in the Clinicum at Charkov, said among other things:

"I must here instance a most peculiar case of alcoholophobia, which I came across in my native town of Yarotsin. The subject was a confirmed drunkard, and in my opinion nothing but a concentrated shock to the nervous system would induce a beneficial reaction. Unfortunately, I did not have my galvanic appliances with me at the time to make the experiment, and when I visited the place again in the recent summer vacation, I was certain that nothing would be left of him but his tombstone. To my surprise, however, I was told, and saw with my own eyes, that the man had become a model member of society. And what do you think had taken the place of the Leyden jar battery I wished to administer to him? A simple clothes-prop. Ah, you may laugh, gentlemen; you do not associate galvanism with clothes-props. Wait and you shall hear. One day . . . ."

But why dish up again the cabbage of yesterday's cooking? Do we not all know the story of Kolba Klamm's regeneration, and of the part Granny Hindelah's clothes-prop played therein?

THE GRANDCHILDREN

GRANDMOTHER stood at the window, mending a boy's coat. The coat could hardly be called a thing of beauty; there was so much patchwork on it that you could not distinguish the original material, though you looked with two pairs of spectacles. The room in which grandmother stood was of a piece with the garment; it was also made of rags, loam rags for the walls and flooring, straw and shingle rags for the roof.

Grandmother's arms felt very tired; she had been holding them up for half-an-hour before she succeeded in threading her needle. Of course, neither Yankel nor Yenta were at home to perform that office for her; they never were when she wanted them, and always when she did not—especially when they came back with empty stomachs, and found that the emptiness had become extended to the larder. Then Yenta would cry, and Yankel would slink into the nearest field, and steal a turnip for himself. That was the manner of life they led, the three of them, and it was not a pleasant one. Grandmother thought so just now; she thought so at least three times in the day, at the hours which properly constituted households set aside for meals. And so it had been ever since her daughter and her daughter's husband had been carried off by the dread plague, which had made that part of the land a great charnel-house five years ago; and Yankel and Yenta and their poverty were the only legacy they had left her.

It was Yankel's coat she was at work on. She was calculating: in four years he would be a Son of the Commandments, and would be able to earn a few copecks by helping Mordecai, the peddler, carry his packages through the neighboring villages; and Yenta would be twelve, and could go into service, if only to black boots and polish the knives. That would be glorious—money coming in from all sides, at least ninety copecks a week, and then Granny herself could live at home in luxury, instead of having to scavenge the little town for odds and ends of victuals, in scorching heat and drenching rain. It would be paradise to rest her brittle limbs, instead of trudging down to the synagogue and standing outside to wait for her dole, hustled and rough-shouldered by the other beggars. She would be able to hold her head high, on a level with other grandmothers to whom God had given sons and daughters, to keep them from the shame of charity bread. Patience, patience; she had waited for a little happiness so long,—hundreds of years, perhaps,—and now she had only four more to wait—a mere fleabite of time, as one would say—and she was quite young yet, only eighty, and down in the village she knew three women who had been grandmothers when she was yet a girl.

Once more she took up Yankel's coat, and looked to find a proper joining for the new patch. Hm! she must hold it a little higher to the light—it suddenly had got very dark—higher still—why, this was a curious thing; the higher she lifted it the less she could see—a great shadow was floating down from the ceiling across her eyes, across the sun, across everything—

surely it was not night? It could hardly be more than two hours past noon, for Yankel and Yenta had not yet come home for their meal—ah, something went snap, snap in her head, tearing her brain to tatters. There was just time for her to grope her way to the straw pallet by the chimney—and there she lay: her happiness had come to her sooner than she had thought.

Ten minutes after, Yankel and Yenta came bounding into the room.

"Give us our dinner," shouted Yankel, at the top of his voice.

"Hush!" said Yenta, with her finger on her lip. There was a funny noise in the room—a husky rattle, or rather a bubbling as of water through a blow-pipe.

"It's only the old woman asleep," said Yankel, indifferently. "Heigh, there!" he shouted. "Leave off snoring, and give us our dinner. What do you mean by sleeping in the middle of the day?"

There was no answer, save the continued bubbling. Angrily Yankel stepped to the couch, and laid his hand on grandmother's shoulder; it felt stiff and edgy.

"If you don't get up instantly, I shall break the window, and then you will get toothache in your joints from the draught," he cried.

This time there was a different answer. The bubbling changed to a long-drawn-out breath, half gulp, half sigh, and after that there was no more bubbling, and no gulping or sighing.

Yankel stepped back, terrified at the sudden silence.

"Get out of the light, Yenta," he whispered.

Yenta stepped round to the other side of the pallet, and bent down.

"Look how white she is—and how her jaw drops, and she does not move or twine her fingers in and out as she always does when she sleeps," she remarked.

A thought had come to Yankel, and he uttered it with fluttering voice.

"Yenta, I don't think she is asleep—I think she is dead."

"Dead? What's that?"

"It means that she cannot give us any more dinners, or go begging for bread and money," replied Yankel.

And then he sat down, and fell into a reverie. He had never much loved this grandmother of his. She had given him too little food, and had made him say too many prayers. All day long it went, "Yankel, have you said grace after your meal—have you said the afternoon service? Yes? I don't believe you—say it at once—a little louder, I cannot hear you—it is the beginning of the month to-day, be careful to insert, 'May our remembrance rise.'" Or, again, it would be: "To-day is Monday and Thursday"—though, of course, it could only be one or the other—"don't forget to say in full, 'And He, being merciful.'" Sometimes he had come home from the Talmud-school fainting and famishing, and there had been nothing to eat, and all the answer he had received to his threats about breaking the furniture and pulling the house down was usually: "Sit down quietly and read a few psalms—that will mean another slice of leviathan for you when you come to Garden Eden."

And now he was safe against these admonitions; the old woman over there would never speak another word. A sense of ease and liberty came over him—he felt so

free and unshackeled. Now he need not say any prayers, unless he wanted to, and that was quite a different thing to saying them under compulsion. Now he could sleep as long as he liked, and would not be aroused by the hateful cry: "Yankel, Yankel, do you wish to say the 'Hear, O Israel' after the permitted time?" He could not have desired anything better, and Yankel felt inclined to jump three feet into the air with delight—and jump he did with a sudden thought which had pricked him that instant. Now that his grandmother was dead, he would have to say the Kaddish, the Mourner's Sanctification, for her during a whole year less a month. That was terrible—it meant getting up soon after daybreak, going to the synagogue twice and sometimes three times a day, and sitting through the whole weariness of the services. He knew how it would be. In the morning, just as he was turning over on the other side, the Belfer, the congregational factotum, would come and call through the window: "Yankel, it is time: come to prayer if you want your grandmother to lie at rest in her grave." And perhaps the snow might be piled outside as high as the lattice. And in the afternoon again, just as he was in the very heat of his games with the other boys, some officious house-master, going along to the synagogue to make the quorum of Ten, would seize him by the nape of his neck, and drag him along, exactly as had been the case with Lemmel Twitchka when he lost his father. And Lemmel had confided to Yankel that his sufferings during that year had been terrible, and it was nothing short of a miracle that he had not followed his father in the course of it. What did Yankel

care whether his grandmother was at rest or not? On the contrary, to pray for her would be doing her an injustice. She had done enough praying and sanctifying during her lifetime, and one ought to give her a chance of seeing whether she got into Paradise on her own merits or through adventitious help.

"Yenta," he said all at once, "we must go away from here."

"What, and leave her?" answered Yenta, pointing to the still figure on the straw. She had been gazing at it all the time, trying to recognize in it the grandmother she had known. Despite Yankel's explanation she still was not clear what it meant to be dead, but from what she saw it must be something beyond the ordinary mysteries of life.

"Leave her? Of course," said Yankel, in a matter-of-fact tone. "Why not?"

"Oh, she looks so helpless," said Yenta. "Suppose somebody came to do her an injury while we are away, she could do nothing to prevent it."

"That's just the very reason," explained Yankel, sapiently; "she cannot help herself, and cannot help us. We must go and find another grandmother, or else we shall go hungry all day—nay, all the year!"

Yenta saw the force of the argument and wavered. "Could we not find a grandmother in the village?" she asked to compromise the matter.

"What, in our village?" echoed Yankel, disdainfully. "What is the good of them? They are all deaf or blind, and, besides, they each have at least fifty grandchildren already. We must go to a big town, where there are plenty to choose from."

Yenta looked thoughtful. "Isn't it funny that we were born without a father and mother?" she said at last.

"Oh, that's nothing," replied Yankel, with a great show of world-wisdom. "There are plenty of children like that; but they had no grandmother either. We did, you see, and therefore we can go to the people and say: 'Give us a new grandmother.'"

"If we went, we might as well look for something better than a grandmother," said Yenta, taken with a new idea.

"What's that?" inquired Yankel.

"A father!" replied Yenta, triumphantly; she was quite sure of producing an effect on her audience. "Don't you know, Yankel, that all the fathers in our village are strong, healthy men, who can work very hard, without wheezing and groaning as grandmother did when she had to do a little washing? And therefore they earn a lot of money, and their children always go about with their crop full. Don't you think it would be better to ask for a father?"

"To be sure," cried Yankel, heartily, almost forgetting the deceit he was practicing on her in the sincerity of his approval. "Come, let us start at once; it is only two thousand miles or so to the next town, and we can walk that in a few hours. We should get there just in time for supper."

"Do you know the way, Yankel?"

"Of course, I do—straight along the forest," replied Yankel, with great assurance. "And now let us see what we can take with us on the road."

He rummaged in the cupboard, and found a chunk

of black bread, and a piece of curd cheese that felt like a chip of white brick. Then they stepped into the open. When they had gone a few paces, Yenta stopped and said: "Wait a minute; I have forgotten something."

She ran back into the house, kissed the white face on the pallet, and put the large prayer-book into the stiff hands. She had been afraid to do so while Yankel was there; he would have laughed at her. And then, without another look, she hurried out to catch up her brother, who had been walking on sturdily. The sunshine cast a golden haze over copse and hedge; the birds were chattering and talking scandal on the trees, and people remarked how beautifully they were singing; the butterflies were turning somersaults in the air for sheer delight. Everywhere there was gladness and life—everywhere save in the little loam hut which the two children had just left behind, and that contained something holier and godlier, for it was full of the angel of peace, who heals long-aching wounds, and makes a truce between the angels of life and suffering.

Yankel and Yenta had been walking a whole hour, and the fatigue of the journey lay upon them heavily; and just then they reached the outskirts of the forest, where the sun-glint rippled over the leaves, and made each one of them seem a smile of welcome.

"How cool it is here!" said Yankel, flinging himself down on the fresh moss. "We may as well rest a little, and have our dinner."

Yenta readily fell in with the proposal, and seated herself beside him; and when they had made away with all the provisions and a little bit of their appetite, they stretched themselves out lazily and luxuriously.

They had not lain on so soft a bed for a long time.

"Yenta, if I fall asleep, be sure to wake me at once," murmured Yankel.

"I shall," replied Yenta, drowsily, and she had just time to see Yankel's eyes close before her own followed suit.

The chill of the evening dew shook Yankel out of his slumber.

"Yenta, Yenta," he cried, "look, we have slept the sun to bed. Quick, let us hasten before it gets dark altogether."

Yenta leaped up with a start, looking round her for the daylight, and only finding a faint streak of pale red glimmering to the west.

She shivered a little. "Don't you think we had better leave the forest, and strike across the open fields?" she asked.

"Why, pray?"

"Because there might be gipsies or ghosts in the wood."

Yankel was just about to draw himself up and start to bluster about his courage and her cowardice, when his eyes fell on the lengthening shadows around, and he answered with a small voice:

"I think you are right, Yenta." So they went on a a little way in silence.

"Isn't it dark?" whispered Yenta.

"What else do you expect at night time?" asked Yankel. "But it won't last very long, the moon will be up presently." And he quickly swallowed the quaver in his voice before Yenta might notice it.

But, despite his prediction, the moon was very tardy

in coming. The sky had rolled itself up in dense, hazy mists, not so thick as storm-clouds, but thick enough to give the moon considerable trouble in breaking through them. So she could only make a little rift, through which she peeped shamefacedly, and what could be seen of her face looked very pale and wan, probably with the exertion.

The two little travellers journeyed on, holding each other very tightly by the hand. They were keeping along a bramble hedge that seemed to stretch endlessly into the darkness.

"Do you really know the road?" asked Yenta, breathlessly.

"Don't ask so many questions, come along," answered Yankel savagely.

Then there was silence again for a little while, until Yenta, despite the risk of incurring her brother's displeasure, spoke up, just to see if her voice had not been frightened out of her entirely.

"Perhaps we shall not find a father after all to-night."

"You with your father," broke out Yankel, "if we had gone only to find a grandmother, we might have come across one already; fathers are much more difficult to get in these hard times."

And Yankel walked on faster, till suddenly he took it into his head to gaze back and see if the world looked so dark behind as it looked in front. No, it did not—a few yards behind him there was a patch of light against the hedge. What might it be? Anybody could have told him it was the little streak of moonshine that had struggled down through the fissure in

the wrack overhead. A minute after Yankel looked round again. It was still there, just as close behind, or a little closer; the rift was shifting.

"What makes you look round like that?" asked Yenta.

"Nothing. I thought—" And then Yankel was silent, and glanced back again. There it was, only it looked different now; it was beginning to take shape; it resembled—what did it resemble? Yankel set his teeth firmly to bite his fear dead between them. Then he turned round once more, and this time he found out what it was.

"She is coming behind us," he whispered, breaking into a run.

"Who—what is?" asked Yenta, quivering.

"She with the white face. Come, let us run; we can run faster than she. She could never catch us when she wanted to give us a beating."

And so they ran on with heaving chests and flying breath. And when they had run across half the world, as it seemed to them, Yankel looked again across his shoulder, and a sob of terror broke from his lips.

"She is still following," he gasped, "she is close behind. She wants to catch me and drag me back to say the Mourner's Sanctification for her every morning and afternoon. Faster, Yenta, faster!"

He gripped her hand harder, and whirled her along with him, until suddenly there was a squeaking, sucking noise under their feet, and the ground became soft and spongy.

"The swamp—the swamp," whispered Yenta.

"Is it the swamp?" cried Yankel, exultantly.

"Then we shall escape her after all; she cannot follow us there, or she will get drowned."

He looked around; the white face was still following; he gave a loud shriek, and, grasping Yenta's hand as in a vice, dragged her on stumbling in the soft morass and oozy slime. He knew just beyond it there was a lake, and in the waters they could hide till the white face had got tired of looking for them. They must be approaching near it; the ground was getting softer and softer, and squelched and squeaked; already the waters were playing about their ankles; they would be safe soon. And suddenly a great watery abyss seemed to open before them; somebody was gripping them by the feet, dragging them down, down, down—and then the placid surface closed up again, and looked innocent, as if nothing had happened.

So Yankel and Yenta found a Father that night, after all—the same who had bidden the moon paint the white face on the bramble-hedge.

TO THE GLORY OF GOD

I

"OUT you go, unless you want me to empty this kettle of boiling water over your head. What have I done to be the mother of such an idle, good-for-nothing, gormandizing glutton? Something to eat, indeed! Pray, what would you like—roasted lamb-tails garnished with burnt duck-feathers? Boiled moonshine with sugar? Blue of the sky baked into pancakes? At six in the evening there's potato-gruel—till then, not a morsel; do you hear? Whoever suggested your name was a prophet; a lump of ill-luck you have been to your parents—nothing else. Are you going or not?"

Just then the lady made a rapid movement in the direction of the afore-mentioned hot-water receptacle, and Jonah thought it time to take her seriously. So he put on his cheeriest smile, thrust his hands into his pockets, and sauntered out leisurely, whistling the jolliest tune he could think of. It was twelve o'clock, and, therefore, it still lacked six hours to the promised meal. But that was a trifle, thought Jonah, not worth while making oneself miserable about.

He strolled a few yards up the village street, and stopped. He saw Mendel, his only brother, coming along. Mendel was twenty, two years older than Jonah, although no one would have thought it, because Jonah was a head taller, and had a chest like a barn-door. Mendel carried a fat volume under his arm, and

was walking very slowly, as though its weight impeded him. His eyes were bent meditatively on the ground.

"Shall I carry your book for you?" sang out Jonah, cheerfully. For answer Mendel shook his head with angry impatience, like one who resents an unwarranted interruption.

Jonah smiled a little scornfully. "I suppose he is puzzling out where a dog has his gizzard, or something equally important," he said to himself. Then he followed him as far as he could. Mendel stepped into the house, and Jonah, mindful of what awaited him within, hung about outside. He expected something, nor was he disappointed. Presently the savor of frying onions floated out upon the summer air. Jonah's organ of smell confiscated most of it; it was a pity to waste such a good thing, even if it did not come exactly within the category of eatables. Ten minutes after, he heard the back-door of the kitchen open and shut. His mother had gone out on an errand. Now was his chance. Quickly he entered the living-room, and found Mendel at the table, seated before a tremendous platter of calf-liver. The fat book lay open beside him. As Jonah came in, Mendel looked up, and glanced apprehensively from his brother to his platter, and back again.

"What do you want?" he asked surlily.

"Nothing in particular," Jonah answered blandly; "I was only thinking that, in case you can't manage all that——"

"Didn't I know it?" screamed Mendel. "As usual, I can't eat a meal without your prowling round to tear it out of my teeth."

"Not so loud, please, dear little Mendel," begged Jonah, hastily—he knew Mendel's tactics—"if you don't think you can spare anything, I shall go away. There's no need to excite yourself so."

"No, I can't spare anything," replied Mendel, unctuously—his mother had used much suet for the liver. "It would be sacrilege. Don't you see I am eating this to the glory of God?" Jonah looked and saw nothing of the kind.

"Blockhead that you are, you must have everything explained to you," went on Mendel. "Well, I need a great deal of food, so that my body may be strong. A strong body makes a strong mind—if one has a mind to begin with. And one needs a strong mind to study God's word; and the study of God's word is to proclaim God's glory. Whereas with you, who don't know an Aleph from a Beth, it really doesn't matter whether you eat oftener than, say, once a month."

Jonah was silent, thinking if he could not find a flaw in his brother's logic; no, it was invulnerable. In the meantime Mendel's mandibles showed he had the courage of his convictions.

"I don't want to state it for a fact," said Jonah after a moment or two; "I only want to ask you—you might have come across it in the course of your studies. Can't one do something for the glory of God by sharing one's food with the hungry?" Mendel stooped low over his book, but that did not prevent Jonah from noticing that his ears had suddenly become quite pink.

"There is something mentioned in the Law on that point," replied Mendel, reverting to his plate; "but they say the passage is spurious, and, therefore, need not be reckoned with."

Jonah was getting desperate; the contents of the dish had half vanished, and still Mendel's pious appetite showed no abatement.

"Do you know, Mendel," he remarked, stepping resolutely to the table, "they say hunger is a law to itself. One must obey the laws, don't you think so?"

"Help, thieves, murder!" shouted Mendel, frantically encircling his earthenware cornucopia with both arms. "Jonah is strangling me."

Before Jonah could make up his mind what further measures to take in the face of this determined opposition, he heard a swish behind, which landed somewhere on his back and made it tingle. Then there was another swish and another tingle. Finally he felt himself collared, and his father's voice said at his ear:

"Is that where your bottomless greed will bring you? Fratricide? You think without that you aren't sure of your passport into Gehennom? I for my part have given it my signature—on your back here. Perhaps you want me to underline it."

Jonah made no answer, but with one wrench of his shoulder he shook his father loose, and went out. Anyone who saw him making his exit, hands in pockets, smile on face, and whistling for all he was worth, would have thought he had just come away from a most pleasurable experience. Jonah walked slowly, as befitted a retrospective mood. He was asking himself, if he really deserved all that people thought and said of him; he wondered why no one gave him credit for wishing well, if they all condemned him for doing ill, and how it was that his name had become a blank cheque which every one could fill in to any requisite

amount of wickedness. How could he help it that he had not been born with the proper appliances for acquiring knowledge, like his brother Mendel? It was perhaps natural that by not keeping up the proud tradition of his family, both on the paternal and maternal side, and becoming a great scholar, like Mendel, he should have forfeited his parents' love. But surely it was not his fault that he was so strong, and therefore could not find employment, because wherever he offered his services, it was feared he would obtrude certain definite notions he possessed about the treatment due to him. He let his father beat him from a sense of filial piety; if it gave his father pleasure, he was not going to grudge it to the old man, whose only other joy in life was his elder son Mendel; but he owed no such piety to a stranger, as the only man in whose employ he had ever been learned to his cost. Since then Jonah had been more or less a vagabond at large, the victim of much prophetic head-shaking and ominous wrinkling of brows, and through it all he went about smiling, whistling, till the prophets became convinced that his only aim and object in life was to vindicate their capacity for soothsaying.

But Jonah knew better: he knew his smile was only skin deep, his whistle came only from his lips, not from his heart. He was tired to death of the general contumely of which he was the target. And yet—why did he endure it? Jonah the adventurous, the devil-may-care, why did he skulk away his time here, instead of taking his knapsack and going off "over all the seven mountains," somewhere where he could start life afresh, and not have his infamy looking at him from

every pair of eyes he met in the street? Yes, why didn't he go?

The answer came tripping along on two dainty little feet; it had a sweet young face, for it had only just stepped over the boundary between childhood and womanhood. When Jonah saw the girl, his hands left his pockets abruptly, and the whistle died on his lips.

"Good-day to you, Fryda," he said.

The mouth closed tightly, and she walked past him without a look.

"What's up?" asked Jonah, uncomfortably.

"Don't pretend you don't know," she said angrily. "Didn't you threaten to kill your brother an hour ago? I heard all about it."

Jonah was staggered. "First of all, it isn't true," he said at last; "secondly, it was only a threat; and, thirdly, what has it got to do with you?"

Fryda's answer was a flush that tinted all her face in a wonderful rose-light. Jonah did not understand that flush; it disconcerted him. He had talked to her hundreds of times, but never before had he noticed the phenomenon.

"Why, what has it got to do with you?" he repeated.

"Pretending again," she answered, but a great deal more gently; "as if you didn't know that your father and mine arranged last night Mendel was to be my husband. You will admit I had good reason to be angry with you for threatening to harm him. But you won't, really, Jonah, will you?"

She lifted her eyes pleadingly to his, and was astonished to see how pale he had become. She thought it was with remorse.

"I won't," he said bluntly. "Tell me one thing, Fryda, are you fond of him?"

"Oh, very: I always was, ever since I can remember. How could I help it when every one talks so well of him? Isn't he the greatest scholar for a hundred miles round? That alone would make me love him. I have always wondered, Jonah, that having such a brother, you are—what you are."

"I often wonder at it myself," said Jonah, and, with a short nod, went on. Fryda did not remark that he had not wished her joy.

Jonah passed on his way with irregular, zigzag steps. People who saw him nodded significantly. "Now he has also taken to drink," they told each other. For the first time Jonah realized what an outcast he was in his parents' house; even such an item of family importance no one had considered it necessary to communicate to him. But the bitterness of that was as honey to the knowledge that the only star in his firmament had been blotted out, and that his soul was now groping in darkness. And yet, what else had he to expect? The weed could not mate with the rose, and the weed had known its unworthiness, and had never avowed its desire. That was something to be grateful for—one humiliation the less. And, therefore, he had more room for his anger. There was nothing left to love now—not even she, who, all the time, had redeemed the others from his hatred; it was a sin to love her. His plan was made: just a little space to revel in this hatred of his, and then, off and away for ever.

When he returned home that night, it was hours after meal-time. The gruel-soup stood on the hearth,

cold and sour. Jonah devoured it, together with a chunk of black bread. The hard fare tasted sweet to his palate. He knew it was not his hunger that sweetened it; the sugar was his great hatred.

II

A week after, Mendel got up in the morning, wishing he had the day behind him. It contained for him business of considerable importance—State business, in fact. The evening before, he had received a message from the Minister of War, asking him to be so good as to come and serve his country. It gave him explicit instructions to present himself by noon at the barracks of the departmental capital,—three hours' journey by wagon from his native place,—and there to draw lots with the other conscripts as to whether he should have the felicity of wearing his Majesty the Czar's uniform for the period of four years. It was natural Mendel should feel anxiety about the issue, because, if he happened to draw the red ticket instead of the white, it would entail certain monetary remedies to rectify the mistakes of chance. His parents were equally anxious.

"If he doesn't draw the white, it will mean four hundred roubles," said his father.

"God forbid, Simon," said his wife; "don't let us open our mouth to evil."

And then the two of them sat down with their psalm-book, and shook their bodies over its contents in a paroxysm of devotion. Fryda came in, and sat close to them, and she prayed for her lover with little prayers of her own making. Jonah went out as he saw her

enter. Nobody asked him to stop, because nobody thought for a moment that his supplications would be any assistance.

But neither the old people's psalms nor the young girl's benedictions proved of any avail. When Mendel came back that evening they could read the red ticket on his face. However, old Simon was a practical man. To begin with, he shrugged his shoulder, then he asked: "When must the exemption money be paid?"

"The day after to-morrow by midday; if not, I must serve," replied Mendel.

"Very good," said the old man.

The following morning he was up betimes, drove into the next town to fetch the money from the local Rabbi with whom it had been deposited for the emergency. It had taken them three years to save it up; it represented much work and toil. But it was worthily applied. Such a child as Mendel deserved everything; he had earned for his parents more credit and honor than could be bought for ten times the amount. It was a joy to make sacrifices for him. What a contrast he was to Jonah, from whom his parents had never had a moment's happiness—Jonah, the peace-breaker, the would-be assassin, the gamester, and—as people had told his father only a day or two ago—the drunkard. Yes, that was the explanation of the sullen, sinister look on his face, the grudging replies, the long absences from home. Ah, but his parents would have their revenge! When his time came to serve, there would not be a copeck ready to buy him out. Let him serve; let him suffer tribulation to chasten his soul. But they must keep their ewe-lamb, their own dear Mendel.

"Take care of them," said old Simon to the latter, handing him the packet of rouble-notes late that evening.

"You can be sure I shall," replied Mendel, with a laugh.

And then he went up to his room, and placed them solicitously in the safest place he could find, under his pillow, undressed, and went to bed, because he had to be up early in the morning.

On the table he had stuck a short candle-stump; it was so short that it could not be used again, but it was a pity to waste the little that remained. By its light he could still read a whole chapter of Gemorah. So he fetched out the book, and set to work. It was an easy passage, and did not require much exertion. Perhaps it was that which made him drowsy; but no, he would finish the chapter. His eyes closed; the next moment they were open again. Then they kept closed a little longer—longer still, till they were shut altogether. Mendel was asleep.

But the candle-stump was awake—a quarter of an inch of it. By and by the wick got down to the level of the table, gasping and choking, for its life-element, the tallow, had melted away. A little of it had got soaked into the wood; the wick-flame followed it, swallowed it, and stretched out an ever-lengthening tongue in its desperate desire for more. Greedily the flame licked the worm-eaten timber, crept further and further, until it had gained a sure hold, and then it rose up like the flag of the besieger over a captured fortress.

Mendel slept on; suddenly something tickled his throat, something bit him on the cheek. He leapt up,

but his cry of terror became stifled in the reverberations of the lurid smoke. Where was the door? Thank God, his hand grasped the latch, and pulled it open just as the dancing fire-goblins leapt triumphantly on to his pallet.

"Father, mother, the house is on fire—save yourselves," he shouted, bursting into their chamber.

A minute after, Mendel and his parents stood in the street, just in time to see the gable-sheaves convert themselves into fast-bound sky-rockets. There had had been no need to warn Jonah; he was not sleeping in the house that night.

"Have you the roubles?" gasped Simon, suddenly.

Mendel's knee-joints gave way.

"God! I forgot them—they were under my pillow."

III

Jonah had spent the night on a truss of straw in a shed half-a-mile away from the village, and so he had remained ignorant of the calamity which had befallen his paternal dwelling. Only when, early next morning, he caught sight of the blackened rafters of the upper story did he gain an explanation of the uproar and tumult pervading the little place. He came closer. The lower part of the house had been saved, owing to the prompt and strenuous intervention of the neighbors. A cart was standing at the door, and beside it a curious scene was enacting itself. Mendel was embracing his mother; his father stood by with streaming eyes and clasped hands; at a little distance was Fryda, stiff as a statue, her face haggard and agony-drawn.

"The money was upstairs, and got burnt," Jonah heard one of the bystanders say; "it has to be paid by twelve o'clock to-day; if not, he must go. Four hundred roubles! Where is one to get four hundred roubles in four hours?"

A thrill of demoniac delight went through Jonah. He understood now why he had been requested to take up his quarters elsewhere for the night. There had been a lot of money in the house, and they were afraid —that was what they had come to think of him. Aye, why should he not feel glad? Was not God fighting on his side? Now was the moment of his revenge, now he could feast his hatred and batten on the heart-blood which was here flowing in torrents.

He strained forward eagerly. Mendel had finished taking leave of his parents, and had turned to Fryda. Jonah was curious what she would say. She said nothing; she only looked at Mendel, and then a long sob came fathoms and fathoms deep out of her soul. The sound made Jonah wonder at himself; it ought to have been sweet music in his ears, but instead, it made him writhe as if some one were jangling his own heart-strings with ruthless fingers. If he heard it but once more they would snap altogether, and he could not afford that; he had only one heart.

"Mendel, I shall go as substitute," he said, stepping up to him.

His brother looked at him, dazed, and Jonah went on in an undertone: "It is only my idea of bringing my mite to the glory of God."

The next moment he was up in the cart, gently pushed the wagoners on one side, and had started the

horses into a gallop. He wanted to get away before Fryda could thank him.

But thank him she did. The following morning the recruits were passing along the high-road skirting the village. The population had turned out *en masse* to watch them. It was a dismal sight—more like a troop of condemned criminals going to their doom. In the last row marched Jonah, a smile on his face, whistling softly to himself; he was the only one among them that carried himself like a man who hopes something from his future. But he kept his eyes in front; he knew his parents and brother stood by the roadside, and he did not want to humiliate them. Suddenly, however, he felt two soft arms round his neck, and a long, warm kiss on his lips.

"To the glory of God," whispered Fryda, and the next moment she had again vanished into the crowd.

"You needn't split one's head with your whistling, just because a pretty girl has kissed you," said Jonah's neighbor morosely: "you aren't the first man to whom that has happened."

But Jonah only whistled.

THE ROAD-MAKERS

I

THE closed carriage, resplendent in its gilt panellings and armorial bearings, sped on briskly behind its magnificent team of greys through the gathering dusk. The road was all humps and bumps, and strewn with much nondescript litter; but the soft bulge of the carriage cushions and the finely elastic poise of the carriage springs made the progress of the vehicle nothing but a pleasant see-saw to the inside occupants. The coachman mumbled "Ave Marias," and the two richly-liveried lackeys on the narrow foot-board behind held on like grim death at each perilous jolt, and thought fearfully of their necks. But what did a plebeian neck or two count to Mylady, especially when she was in a hurry?

Mylady lolled back luxuriously, wrapped in pleasurable anticipations. She was going to a big ball given in the provincial capital by the Governor of the department, and she expected a very good time there. Her husband, the district Prefect of police,—by the way, he was her third attempt at matrimony,—had, at the last moment, been taken with a providential attack of gout, which forced him to hug his own impolite company. So she had to content herself with the escort of her son by her first marriage, a long, sandy-haired youth in his early twenties, and she did it without great demur. Her elderly husband was not jealous, but, be-

ing a police official, he was naturally prone to put a false construction on things; and, perhaps, what concerned that dashing Colonel of Cossacks, whom she had met last season at St. Petersburg, and who now was chief of the Governor's body-guard—yes, perhaps her behavior to him had been a little indiscreet. And that was why she felt so good-humored; to-night, at least, she need not trouble herself with questions of discretion or the other thing. After all, one lived but once, and the devil gives no discount for wasted opportunities.

Yes, she was going to have a very good time that evening. It was only a pity they would get there rather late, much too late to give her Cossack the opening polonaise for which he had begged so hard. But things had gone rather contrary with her toilet that afternoon. Her Parisian maid had shown herself unusually clumsy. The grey patch on Mylady's head would not take the dye, the enamel would not stick to her shoulders, the rouge went all streaky. She regretted the delay all the more, because the Cossack was—she knew from past experience—quick to take offence, and would be sure to look on her tardy arrival as a personal affront. Only, of course, till she explained; one of the horses had cast a shoe, they had had to stop at the smithy, and the smith had been drunk. He would pretend to disbelieve her, would overwhelm her with reproaches for her indifference, and she would be able to listen without apprehension of a scowling pair of eyes glaring misconstructions at her from beneath knitted brows. How she would enjoy the Cossack's passionate chiding! So the hour's delay was after

all a mistake on the right side. But two hours would have meant stringing the bow too taut. And that was what would have happened, if she had not insisted on taking the by-path, which the gipsies had hewn out for their caravans, instead of putting up with the whimsicalities of the zigzagging high-road, which ran in and out every petty hamlet it came across, just as an idle housewife gads about from neighbor to neighbor, gossiping with any one who will give her a hearing.

Mylady could not congratulate herself sufficiently on her firmness. All the servants had warned her against the gipsy path, saying that the ground was not to be trusted at the best of times, much less after the spring rains. She knew them, the varlets. It was their cowardice that spoke, nothing else. It was the gipsies they were afraid of. Bah, a handful of jackal starvelings, whom one could scare off with a shout! She did not fear them; that would have been beneath the dignity of one who was presently to listen to fire-winged words from a Hetman of Cossacks. And as for the path, why, it was as smooth as her husband's bald pate,—no, that was a stupid comparison,—as smooth as the ice-track upon the back-water of the Great Neva, over which they had whirled that memorable winter evening, when her Hetman first told her that beside the sheen of her hair and teeth the moon-glint upon his steel scabbard showed as the color of rust. For all evidence to the contrary, she might be whirling over that same ice-track now. The lying, cowardly hounds, how they had maligned the path for their own lying, cowardly ends! Every moment it was getting better and better, smoother and smoother, and now she could

almost swear the carriage was scarcely moving, so steady and comfortable . . .

"I wonder what they have stopped for," said her sandy-haired son the next instant.

Mylady sat up with a start. "You don't say they have stopped, Feodor?" she inquired anxiously.

But before Feodor could answer, the stentorian "Hee-o, Hee-o" from the coachman told its own tale. The greys never required encouragement of whip or word once they were started.

"What's the matter, Nicolai?" asked Feodor, leaning out through the window.

"The road is a quagmire for fifty yards ahead, sir," was the sullen reply.

"What's that?" said Mylady, stridently.

"And we can't go on," added Nicolai.

"Can't go on?" shrieked Mylady. "What are the beasts made of—sugar? Lash them, Nicolai, lash them, I tell you."

There was a whistle of whipcord, a neigh of rage and pain, two or three wrenches that bounced Mylady up and down like a shuttlecock, and then again a sudden halt.

"The bog is up to their bellies," Nicolai stolidly reported progress.

"What shall we do—what shall we do?" wailed Mylady, wringing her hands.

Sandy-haired Feodor shrugged his shoulders unsympathetically. "Get them out while we can, and turn back," was his advice.

"Can't they force their way through the thicket on one side or the other?" suggested Mylady with a flash of hope.

"The brambles would rip them up before they had gone a yard," replied Feodor. "Don't make a fuss, matushka, but let's go home quietly."

"Go home? And what about the ball?" screamed Mylady.

"We must leave that for another time," said Feodor, with that thin, twanging laugh of his. "We have to go back where we strike the high-road, which will bring us to the palace somewhere about midnight. And you know it isn't etiquette to arrive after ten."

Then Mylady had her say, in the course of which short cuts, quagmires, and etiquette came in for most unkindly mention. And while the beautiful lips spat forth toads of abuse, and the delicate hands clawed the air in impotent desperation, Mylady's dutiful son wriggled in the corner of the carriage, choking with inextinguishable laughter. That was how his mother's outbursts of rage always affected him. And it was really very thoughtful and considerate of her to do something to beguile the tedium of the homeward journey, for the horses ambled along at a funeral pace, having got more or less crippled in extricating themselves from the glutinous slush. But the observations that Mylady had let fall on the way were mere 'prentice work to her efforts when she reached home, and talked the matter over with her husband. Among other things she threatened to prosecute him for attempted murder, inasmuch as he, being district Prefect of police, allowed promiscuous and unconsidered quagmires to lie about, a snare and a pitfall to trustful travellers. This was a remark which the Prefect thought very much to the point. He was a man most

conscientious in doing the things that pertained to his own comfort, and foreseeing the possibility of his wife's having again occasion to use the short cut, he took measures accordingly. The next morning he ordered his secretary to set up a formidable report of a catastrophe, in which a huge probable loss of human life was averted only by his presence of mind and faithful application to duty; but that the countryside in question was in a most precarious condition and in constant danger of a landslip, and unless it was attended to at once, he would not answer for the consequences.

So Mylady was foiled in her expectations of being undisturbedly indiscreet at the Governor's ball, and the Hetman gnawed his moustache all night, and cursed the inconstancy of woman. But this is the inner history of the events that led to the driving of the new big road from Dirschk to Tomalov.

II

The news of the projected enterprise spread rapidly, and poured joy into the towns and villages along the intended route. Everybody saw the commercial value of being contiguous to what would probably develop into a great artery of highway traffic; those of a more sanguine disposition even opined that the road was only the forerunner of something better, and that in no very long time to come the steam-horse would go puffing past, converting their fifth-rate little township into a world's fair twice the size of Nijni-Novgorod. However that might be, there could be not an atom of doubt as to the immediate benefits to be derived

from the actual building of the road. There would be work and to spare during the whole summer for any one who had but a hand and a foot; wages would be paid in silver rouble pieces, and the country for miles around would be musical with the tinkle of coin. Which is the music best suited to set the heart dancing. And, indeed, something of the sort was urgently needed. The outlook ahead was very black for the preponderating multitudes, whose hands are in constant danger of forgetting the way to their mouths, and the year showed every promise of being an unusually lean and hungry one. A phenomenal period of frost had bitten dead the potatoes without leaving the faintest hope of doctoring them into marketableness; the turnips, out of pure tender-heartedness, it would seem, had followed them to destruction; and where potatoes and turnips had gone under, it would have been folly to expect delicately constitutioned cereals to make anything of a show. Nor was it any use pinning one's faith to the wheat harvest. The farmers knew from bitter experience that what the winter blight had spared would fall a victim to summer droughts; for these two usually worked in collaboration, with a nice eye to the metereological average. Well, for this once the poor were safe; they could stand gibing and jeering at the famine fiend as he slunk by, yapping with gaunt jaws and shaking a skeleton fist in angry impotence at the prey that had escaped him. He had reckoned without one who was mightier than he, even the mighty White Czar—the same who kept all their names in his pocketbook so that he might send for them, when conscription time came round, and teach them how to die for him. And

now he had hit on this grand idea of the new road to enable them to live for him. Long rule the great Little Father!

However, there was one man who was convinced in his own mind that he, and he alone, was responsible for this universal godsend, and that the others only benefited by the grace specially vouchsafed unto him. The man who thus boldly claimed a place in history was Yossel Plonski, a Jewish resident of Ushansk, and greatly in want of money. For months past he had been pestering heaven to extricate him from the predicament in which he was caught, and the building of the new road was, of course, the response to his prayerful importunities. It happened in this wise. On the last day of the Feast of Dedication the said Yossel had betrothed in marriage his daughter Milkah, his one and only child, and—of his own accord, he had to admit—had inserted in the betrothal contract a clause promising her a hundred roubles for dowry. But that was before the frost-blight had killed all trade for the year, and left Yossel, who earned a livelihood by hawking from farm to farm, to face the future as upright as he could with that crushing liability on his back. And what was worse, the reserve fund, which was to have gone a good way towards meeting it, had to be trenched upon, and presently began to wear a rather peaky look. But then Yossel bethought himself that if marriages were made in heaven, it was only fair that dowries should be made there as well. So he set the three patriarchs, who also had married off a daughter or two in their time, and knew what it meant, to intercede for him, with the result already stated. Yossel was among

the first to hear of the manifesto for unskilled labor and among the first to apply for employment. However, he applied without consulting his daughter, and only told her about it when he could simultaneously inform her that his application had been successful.

Milkah heard him, and her deep eyes seemed to eddy like a well into which somebody has thrown a stone.

"But, father, you are not going for a stonebreaker, are you?" she asked in pained surprise.

"And why not for a stonebreaker?" Yossel asked jovially in return.

"Because—because you are not so young as you were," replied Milkah, hesitatingly.

"Nor so old as I shall be," laughed Yossel. "That is a foolish reason for a daughter of mine."

"Well, then, I shall give you a wiser. There is no necessity for you to do this. With what we have left, you can sit comfortably at home, and wait for the good times to come round again."

"And Baruch, and your marriage that is to be in five months, and the dowry that is set down in the contract?"

"Baruch will not claim it, I can vouch for that, father," said Milkah, blushing a little.

Yossel noted the blush, and drew his own conclusions from it.

"That is the way with all girls, and your mother—may she rest softly in Paradise—was just the same," he remarked with affected indignation. "They think that the man who gets them fills his house with such untold treasure that they wonder where he can still find room for a single copeck piece, and when there is

a talk of roubles, she suspects at once that the lover's vows he breathes into her ear are really meant for her father's pockets."

"Can you blame her for it?" smiled Milkah.

"Well, no, not exactly," stammered Yossel, taken aback; "but then, who can ever blame youth for being unwise? God made it so purposely, so that it might find out for itself what life is like. Of course, while a woman pleases her husband's eye, it makes no great difference whether she has brought him anything besides herself or not. But I am thinking of the time when she is not so young as she was," and Yossel's eyes twinkled. "It is then that the roubles come in useful. It was not her fault that he married her; he must blame the roubles that enticed him."

Milkah laughed, but presently she answered gravely: "If Baruch will have any fault to find with me, I would much rather he blamed me, though there were a thousand others willing to take the blame on themselves. I should want no scapegoat."

Yossel made a comical gesture of discontent. "Limb of disobedience," he exclaimed in mock reproof, "to turn on your father with such a ready mouth! But I shall confuse you yet. Thus far I have spoken of the case only as it concerns you; now I must stand on my own ground. You remember, I suppose, that the clause as to the dowry was put in of my own initiative."

"Which is all the more reason why you should not consider yourself bound by it," said Milkah.

Yossel looked at her cunningly. "That is what you think," he replied finally. "But it is just because I made the promise of my free will that I may say I

hanged myself with a rope of my own twisting. If I had been forced into the condition, it would have been my duty as a self-respecting man of business to take advantage of your Baruch's stupidness and keep the money in my own coffers. But I gave my uncompelled word, and that makes it a matter of honor that I should not depart from it. You see, my word is my only capital. Now, a rich man need not keep his word, because he can keep his money instead. If the poor man does not keep his word, well, then, he becomes still more of a poor man than he was before."

By such sophistries Yossel tried to disguise from his daughter how he had set his heart on giving the husband of this one motherless ewe-lamb of his a good start in life, knowing that the start meant everything. But Milkah did not let herself be deceived for a moment, and only wondered that with one such man to love, it should ever have entered her head to bestow a single heart throb on a second.

The promptitude wherewith the road operations were taken in hand bordered on the miraculous. Scarcely two months had passed since the Prefect's report had gone in, and already sufficient freestone had been hewn from the famous hillside quarries four miles east of Tomalov to make a good start with the work. Yossel was not employed at the quarries, but was told off to one of the road-gangs stationed in relays along the projected route. He had been fortunate in as far as he began to earn wages from the very outset of the work—indeed, in after-life he went about bragging that it had been deputed to him to inaugurate the whole enterprise, as it was his pick that had struck

the initial stroke. His good fortune was due to the fact that Ushansk was the village nearest to Tomalov, which was the starting point of the new road, and where it branched out of the main road, of which it was an off-shoot—the same main road which the Prefect's wife had refused to take owing to its labyrinthine vagaries. With rare considerateness, which strongly accentuated the providential aspect of the whole thing, the authorities had decreed that each navvy should be posted as near as possible to his domicile, so as to facilitate his arrangements for night accommodation and commissariat. And so the residents of Ushansk, being closest to the quarry pits as well as to Tomalov, had an advantage over the natives of the villages further down the route in being served before all others by the transports with the boulders that gave their hammers exercise and their pockets a silver lining. And the other villages, of course, were proportionately jealous.

About a week after the work had got into swing, the Ushansk gang was reinforced by a man who was a stranger to one and all of them. But beyond a cursory glance or two of curiosity, his arrival attracted little notice. For the laborers formed a hotch-potch gathering, to which the four corners of the earth seemed to have made a point of contributing. It was seen, however, that he was of almost gigantic stature, with shoulders to match. His face, too, was remarkable, inasmuch as it possessed none of the characteristics of the Mujik type, as one might expect in a man who broke stones for a living. He had rather a frank and open look, and his lips did not appear to require

much provocation for expanding into a smile, despite the touch of sadness that lurked far down in his eyes. His age might have been anything between thirty and forty, with the balance in favor of the latter. He repaid the indifference wherewith his appearance was treated by an indifference as great, and went about his work with a cordial good-will. There could be no doubt about his tremendous strength; for he wielded his hammer with either hand, as easily as a child might handle its little spoon to fish the sops from out of the milk-bowl.

Chance made him Yossel's immediate neighbor. They had been working side by side for two hours without the interchange of a word, when the stranger became aware of something in Yossel that perplexed him considerably. It was Yossel's attitude of body while working.

"Why do you squat on your haunches like a frog ready for the jump?" asked the stranger after some hesitation. "Why don't you kneel as I do? It's easier and more comfortable."

Yossel turned round, startled, but only a very little. The speaker's mode of address, though somewhat brusque, showed no trace of impertinence or malignity. But for all that Yossel did not find his question easy to answer, for it involved a point he did not care to discuss with a man of alien faith with whom he was conversing for the first time in his life. So he prevaricated.

"Why I don't kneel? Oh, because I have a bruise on my left knee," he said.

"Well, then, why don't you spread your coat under-

neath for a cushion?" advised the stranger. "Here, take mine as well—that will make it thicker and softer."

Embarrassed Yossel fumbled in his mind for an answer; but the next instant the stranger again drew his attention by an exclamation of wonder.

"Why, there are a number crouching like you," said the stranger, looking about him. "Is there an epidemic of sore knees in these parts?" And then a smile of intelligence broke over his face, as he continued: "Dolt that I am—all you that crouch are Jews, and your crouching is a sign for you to know each other by. Is it not so?"

By this time Yossel's mind was made up. The stranger had stumbled as far as the half-truth, which was a dangerous halting-place to leave him at. And, moreover, Yossel did not like his allusion to preconcerted signs of recognition, which might so easily be misconstrued in a country ruled by suspicion and tyranny. But he would furnish the true explanation, chiefly because his questioner seemed likely to listen to it with an indulgent and dispassionate ear.

"You are right as to our being Jews," began Yossel, in his fragmentary Russian, "and that, in a way, is the reason why we sit on our haunches while we work, instead of resting on our knees. For you may know that we have been commanded by our God to keep ourselves separate and apart from the Gentiles and not to imitate their customs and habits. And especially we may not bend the knee, because that is what you Gentiles do when you pray to your God."

"And you hold with the adage that 'laborare est

orare,'" interposed the stranger, smiling thoughtfully.

Yossel had no idea what that meant, nor did he pretend to have, but went on unperturbedly with his parable.

"Only on three days in the year are we permitted to kneel, on the days whereon we supplicate to have our trespasses forgiven, and God sits in judgment upon His people. However, that is a practice dating back to the time of King Solomon's temple, long before Christians were thought of. And that is why it is not considered an imitation of their ways, as the other would be."

"Very curious, very curious," muttered the stranger to himself. And then speaking aloud he said:

"But the fatigue must be double like that—your back must ache terribly."

Yossel laughed, almost in triumph. "We have ached worse than that; we have been strapped to the rack a thousand times, and our backs are not yet broken."

"Very true, very true," muttered the other to himself, as he had done before.

And after that nothing more was said between the two, till the overseer's whistle sounded for dinner. The big stranger sat down on a granite block, unslung his red handkerchief, and took from it a lump of curd cheese, an onion, and a chunk of black bread. He glanced at Yossel, who stood drying his forehead with his shirtsleeves and looking eagerly towards the village.

"Hey, comrade, do you call eating also walking in the ways of the Gentiles?" exclaimed the stranger, jestingly.

"No, I am waiting for something better than you have got," replied Yossel in the same vein; "I have my meal brought to me from the village. It is a little late to-day."

But not very much later, for scarcely had Yossel finished speaking, when Milkah hove in sight, stepping as fast as she could without spilling the contents of the steaming saucepan she carried. And presently she stood before him, stroking his heated face with a cool hand, and overwhelming him with loving reproaches for taking on himself so onerous a toil for her own selfish sake. Yossel heard her complacently, for her reproaches were an everyday occurrence, and he knew better than to let them spoil his appetite. And so, while her hand played amid his sweat-sodden hair, he did full justice to the savory stew of barley and potatoes, flavored with leek and a piece of ox-shin boiled into shreds. Indeed, he was more than half way through with his meal, before he bethought himself again of his new acquaintance. He turned on him with a smile, which was wasted, because the stranger's gaze hung, pent and tense, on Milkah. He sat there, his clasp-knife with a morsel of cheese on the tip of it suspended midway to his mouth, as though he had forgotten what he was about to do with it. Yossel watched him thus, half in amusement, half in pride, because there was nothing in the manner of the stranger's scrutiny of Milkah to cause the father of any daughter a moment's annoyance or disquietude. And further, when the eyes of the two men eventually met, the younger showed no irritation, no discomposure, which might be natural in one who had been surprised

in some discreditable back-thought. With a short nod at Yossel, he carried the clasp-knife to his lips, and his jaws moved stolidly.

"My daughter," said Yossel, jerking his head at Milkah in a way that might have served either as explanation of her presence or as introduction.

The stranger evidently took it for the latter, and to this Milkah was indebted for being able to add a novel experience to the few her life had accumulated so far. For the next instant the stranger had risen to his feet, and was bowing to her with stately courtesy, just as, peeping through the railings, she had seen the gentlemen bow to the ladies in the Prefect's park at Tomalov. She had often wondered what it must feel like to be bowed to in that way; and now that she knew, she wondered that the ladies who promenaded in the Prefect's park did not carry their noses twice as high as they did. But more than that it exercised her mind, how it had come that a man who knew how to curtsy like that should be making his dinner off raw onions. And then her thoughts veered round to Baruch, and a vague sense of guilt came over her for having allowed herself a passing interest in the history of another man, even though his gestures might be as graceful as those of a Parisian dancing-master's. She would write Baruch her confession of it, and ask his forgiveness that very evening. For Baruch lived at Wilna, where he was struggling to set a small hosiery business on its legs, and visited his fiancée only at irregular intervals. And thus having salved her conscience, she hurried back home as soon as her father had finished with the saucepan. She had not acknowledged the stranger's elab-

orate salute save by a momentary flushing of the cheek.

The acquaintance between Yossel and the stranger took rapid strides towards intimacy. After several days Yossel actually knew that the other's name was Sergius, that he came from nowhere in particular, and that his identity was of no importance to any one. And Yossel was quite satisfied with that, for, after all, he knew that Sergius was only a bird of passage, who would fly out of his ken as soon as the task which had mated them together had been brought to a finish. And, meanwhile, it was very pleasant to have in your immediate neighborhood an Orthodox Russian who did not, at every turn, call you Christ-slayer and thief, and who, moreover, protected you from the opprobrium of the others. This last was the consideration that inclined also Milkah to show herself more affable to the stranger, though at first there was something in his subdued, almost dog-like, demeanor whenever she favored him with a word or look that distressed her. But, as the days went on, she became familiar with the feeling, and looked upon this strangely deferential attitude of his as a habit natural to the man, and not as a peculiarity that ought to trouble her. This was probably the way in which he treated all women he came across, and she was not important enough that he should make an exception in her case. Besides, the main point was that her father should get his dinner regularly, and compared with that the question whether and why the stranger behaved to her as he did, was altogether immaterial.

One day, however, Milkah came with the customary

saucepan, without finding her father in his usual place. But before she had had time to grow anxious, she was informed by Sergius that, owing to a sudden emergency, Yossel with some others had been sent down to the quarries.

"To the quarries?" echoed Milkah, with a troubled look. "Then what will he eat all day?"

Sergius seemed to have been waiting for the question. "If you will trust me with the saucepan," he began.

Milkah quickly shook her head. Her father, stubborn in his adherence to the traditional law, would never eat the food which had been brought to him by the hand of a Gentile.

"It is three quarters of an hour to the quarries, and you ought not to deprive yourself of your midday rest," she gave as an equally valid reason for her refusal of his offer. "I have nothing else to do; I shall take it there myself."

"But you would not know where to find him," said Sergius, quickly; "the quarries are a mile long."

"Then how would you find him?" asked Milkah, dismayed at the new difficulty.

"I should know where to look," was his brief reply. And then a new idea seemed to strike him, and he added eagerly:

"Let me guide you there."

Milkah considered. It was true, the man wanted his short rest; but then, her father wanted his dinner, and it did not take her long to decide which consideration outweighed the other. She turned to him resolutely.

"Well, then, if you will be so good," she said; "but

remember, you must protect me, if father gives me a scolding for having troubled you. You know it was your own choice."

Sergius gave a laugh that seemed to draw an echo from the stone piles around him. And then they started off, Sergius carefully adjusting his pace to that of Milkah, without having to give himself scant measure at that; for Milkah remembered that the contents of her saucepan were getting cold. Sergius, sure of his audience this time, told her what had led to Yossel's being shifted from his customary station. There had been, as she knew, a thunder-storm in the night, and the short, but heavy, rainfall had filled the quarry hollows to the very brim; and Yossel had been one of the contingent despatched to assist in baling them out. The week before the same thing had occurred, and then it had been Sergius' turn to go down to the quarries. These, no doubt, were the identical hollows, and hence his assurance of being able to lay his finger on Yossel in a moment, whereas Milkah would have had to blunder along the whole range of the hillside, asking questions and by no means certain of helpful or parliamentary replies. And as Milkah listened to him, she suddenly became aware that she owed her companion a greater debt of gratitude than she had had time or inclination to acknowledge to herself. But, withal, she felt a curious dislike to be under an obligation to him; nothing would have pleased her more than to repay him, and cry quits with him at once. The next instant her eye lighted on the blood-stained rag about his wrist that just then peeped out from under his frayed coat-sleeve. Here was her opportunity.

"You have hurt yourself," she said, pointing to the bandage.

"Nothing much," he replied eagerly; "I slipped and fell on a flint. It is healing."

"This will make it heal more quickly," said Milkah, diving in her pocket and fetching out a strip of arnica plaster; "I always have some about with me—in case father requires it," she added in explanation.

He took it avidly, and thanked her as effusively as though she had been the immediate means of preserving his life. But he forgot to apply it, and she did not remind him. It would have meant a minute's delay. And her poor old father would be famishing as it was.

Sergius was full of his thoughts, and Milkah was husbanding her breath for the effort of the walk, and so the remainder of the journey was accomplished almost in silence. Sergius varied, or rather enriched, his stock of meditations by an occasional sidelong glance at the girl. He had seen her once every day for the last fortnight, and yet to-day she came on him as a bewildering revelation. He knew how beautiful she was, but not how beautiful she could be. For that he had had to wait till the sun-bloom came and laid itself lovingly upon the usual pallor of her face, kissing it into a tint of roses, and softening the curve of cheek and chin with caressing touch. More furtively, as though with a stronger sense of the forbidden, he permitted himself a glance at the gleaming alabaster of her arm, shimmering forth dazzlingly through the thin muslin blouse—the blouse, the present from her Baruch, which had arrived that very morning, and

which she had donned for her father's admiration. And from the arm Sergius's gaze travelled further downward, until it stopped at the narrow gold hoop encircling the forefinger of her left hand. And with that his heart also made a momentary halt, as it always did, when the sight of the gold hoop troubled him with misgivings as to its meaning. And then the query escaped him unawares—he would never have had the courage to ask it deliberately.

"The ring—what it means?" echoed Milkah, calmly. "It means nothing."

To her understanding the reply was innocent of all quibble. Of what significance indeed was this ring, the outward token of her pledge to Baruch, to any one save to Baruch and herself? Least of all did it concern the stranger at her side. But Sergius seized on the letter of her words, and he had hard work to choke back the cry of exultation, just as it was about to force itself vent.

Ten minutes more and the quarry lay before them.

"There he is," exclaimed Milkah, her keen young eye instantly picking Yossel out from the nearest group of men. "Don't come any farther. He will be very grateful to you."

"And you?" ventured Sergius, smilingly.

"I, of course, as well," answered Milkah, not knowing whose was the rudeness—hers for having forgotten, or his for having reminded her.

Sergius did not turn back immediately, but covered the few yards between him and the jutting rock spur, at the point where the hillside fell down most sheer and precipitous into the valley beyond. He had stood

at the same spot a week ago, and had seriously deliberated with himself whether there was any valid reason why he should not take the one step forward, and have done with it all—have done with the nagging memories of the might-have-been, and the chafing outlook on an unprofitable, purposeless future. Just that one step forward; death was the only progress in life he could hope to make. But he had refrained; he would give himself another respite. The same door was always open to him. And he had been right; everybody said that patience was a very good thing, and it is always darkest before dawn. To-day the height on which he stood was not put there for a convenient leap into the devil's arms, but was an eminence fit for a man whose hope was lifting him towards the clouds, and who felt a king in a world of grovelling worms.

He turned away slowly, falling presently into a rapid stride, which broke into a breathless run as soon as he was out of sight of the quarrymen. And so he ran, taking prodigious bites out of the hunk of black bread he had stuffed into his pocket at Milkah's approach, devouring it partly to satisfy his hunger, but more to stifle the shouts of joy, which were forcing themselves up again, and would have made him seem an escaped lunatic to any chance passer-by. For resuming work half an hour late, the overseer docked his wages for the day, and put the fine into his own pocket. Sergius did not complain; on the contrary, he laughed at having to pay so cheaply for a pleasure for which he would have been afraid to name his own price. Why, the strip of arnica plaster alone more than fully covered the loss.

If Sergius had been afraid of appearing demented in the daytime, he would have given still more cause for it to any stray onlooker who could have watched him that night in the wretched loam-hut he had rented for twenty copecks a week. What could any one have made out of him, squatting on his haunches in the middle of his hut, and hammering into fragments a huge granite block he had brought with him from the road? But Sergius knew. He remembered that the attitude involved some question as to the way the people of Yossel's race communed with their God; and this was one of the things by which they meant to please Him. He did not know much about this God of theirs; but at all events it would be politic to try and make a good impression on Him. For Sergius surmised vaguely that on the grace wherewith Milkah's God regarded him depended the favor she would vouchsafe to him herself.

III

The next morning young Feodor, Mylady's straw-haired son, ate his breakfast with a bad appetite and a still worse temper. The day before he had suffered a severe disappointment in what he euphemistically called love, and he had lain awake all night putting ointment on his wounded vanity, and nursing his revenge. And now, having succeeded in putting the night behind him, his mind was disagreeably exercised how to do the same with the long, tedious, fly-buzzing summer day, which loomed mockingly ahead of him. What a difficult thing it was to kill time; it died so hard. It was almost

easier to kill a man, and certainly far more exciting. He thought scathingly of his flighty-headed little mother for having married into this third-rate district capital, where there was no Café Chantant, no Casino, none of the real necessaries of life. She ought to have known better; she had already made two matrimonial blunders; the third was a crime. But then she never considered anybody except her own foolish self. If at least she would increase the allowance she made him, so that he could indulge in an occasional fortnight at St. Petersburg; yet when he mentioned the matter to her, she looked aggrieved, and pointed out to him the duty she owed to Society at Tomalov as its leader of fashion. And yet, she must be extremely wealthy. Her first husband had left her at least half a million roubles, and her second . . . A smile of amusement played about Feodor's thin lips. Yes, that was a joke. The recollection of it almost put him into a better humor; at least, it reminded him that whatever might have happened to the children of other parents, he at any rate was certain of being his mother's sole and single heir.

But meanwhile the great question of time-killing remained still unsolved. He got up and lit a cigarette. Ah, he had an idea; it was not much of an idea, but, at least, it would dispose of the morning. And the afternoon, perhaps, would bring its own counsel. He would go down and see how the new chaussee was getting on. The sight of the poor wretches devilling away week in, week out, for what would hardly fetch a bottle of inferior Tokay, would edify and instruct his soul. He was always susceptible to the morals of life—as

long as there was enough life and not too much morals. Well, if the spectacle would only teach him to put a higher premium on his unlimited leisure, it would be something. At all events, he would find out whether it was really true, that the sweat of the worker's brow is the salt of the bread of idleness.

Jauntily he went out, flicking his riding whip against his top-boots. Ten minutes later he came upon the first group of laborers, and favored them with an insolent stare, as though they were some strange kind of animal brought there for his special delectation. They all knew him for the Prefect's step-son, and touched their caps respectfully. Presently he passed Sergius. The latter was hammering on automatically, his thoughts intent on the happenings of yesterday, and hearing or seeing nothing besides. Feodor stopped in front of him with a snarl of irritation.

"Salute, impudent rascal," he shouted.

Half startled Sergius was about to lift his hand in mechanical obedience, when a glance at Feodor's face made the blood rush into his own; then a quick-drawn breath, and the next instant his eyes were fixed on the motions of his hammer as though nothing had happened. Feodor himself had taken a step or two backward in his surprise, but now he came forward again, watched Sergius for a few moments at his work, and then burst into a long guffaw, or at least, as near as he could get to it with that laugh of his that twanged like a guitar.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Sergius Kouranowich," he said mockingly as soon as he could speak.

Sergius went on with his hammer, and for all the

attention his face showed, he might have been born deaf and dumb. Feodor waited a little, and then resumed in a voice of affected reproachfulness:

"Now, this isn't fair, Sergius Kouranowich; you don't seem a bit pleased to set eyes on me again after all these long years. Perhaps you haven't even given me an occasional place in your thoughts. Well, I was kinder. I thought of you only this morning, and my laughing just now was due not to rudeness,—you know how carefully I was brought up,—but to a sudden recollection of the joke your dear lamented father played on you. I would swear you remember that joke yourself."

Sergius showed as impassive as the stone he was hammering.

"But you must not give your father the whole credit for it," went on Feodor; "that belongs to my mother. The thing was really her invention, as you may have guessed already. You see, she is so very pretty, and her tastes are so very expensive, and your father surely could not do better with his money than leave it to her to buy dresses and jewelry and make herself as beautiful as possible in a world where there is so much ugliness. What's that you are muttering? Did you say he was an old fool for all that?"

"You are braver than you deserve to be," grated Sergius from between set teeth.

Feodor's laugh twanged again, and he took another step forward. "You mean because I twist the bull's tail with no fence between us," he said almost pleasantly. "Of course, I am aware that you could batter my skull in with one sweep of your hammer. But I

pin my faith to old Maryashka, who tells fortunes and misfortunes for her living. True, she said I would die a violent death; that was a pretty safe guess of hers. But she also said, and swore to it, that the blow which sent me to the angels would also despatch my murderer. So if you kill me, you will also have to die instanter, if only to save Maryashka's credit. But that creates a rather difficult situation. I don't know how you propose to solve it."

And he affected to listen with much curiosity to the other's reply. But, of course, none came.

"However, you certainly were foolish in refusing the share your father offered you," continued Feodor, tapping Sergius confidentially on the shoulder. "You don't know how it grieved my mother. It made her think that you were annoyed with her, and she doesn't like people to be that; she is so wonderfully sensitive."

"The painted she-fiend," broke with a roar from Sergius.

"No, no," remonstrated Feodor, soothingly, "how can you call her that, Sergius Kouranowich? She is really so very, very pretty, and her ways are so soft, and her hands are whiter than any woman's I have seen. And then, she bears you no ill-will at all; on the contrary, but for her you might at this moment be begging your bread from door to door. You see, if she had not stuck in the mud the night she went to the Governor's ball, nobody would have thought of building this road. Shall I take her your thanks? You might at least answer me yes or no; but then you never were much of a talker. The devil and seven saints," he exclaimed, clapping his hands to his ears, "what's that?"

But it was only the overseer's whistle shrilling the dinner hour a yard or two away from him. Sergius dropped his hammer, and, without further ceremony, out came the hunk of black bread, the cheese, and the onion.

"I am not going to wish you a good appetite for that," laughed Feodor; "it would be cruel. I shall come to see you again, though; it is very pleasant to talk over the old times, Sergius Kouranowich; don't you think so?"

And merrily cracking his riding whip, he turned to go, only, however, to pause again after a yard of two. Milkah had just come up, bringing her father's dinner, for Yossel was at his old post again. Even Sergius could not have refrained from laughing, had he seen the look of ludicrous astonishment wherewith Feodor fixed the girl before finally continuing on his way. But Sergius' gaze was turned inward. He was thinking of the malevolent chance which had jogged awake again the aching memories of things gone by, just when time —or was it something else?—was beginning to steep them in opiates. The old irreparable wrong cried out afresh, and God knew how long it would take him again to silence it. He and his father had lived together in love and amity, till their evil destiny had thrown into their way the painted vixen, who entangled the old man's senses in her wiles, and then ousted the son from his birthright and heritage. The old man had been blameless, Sergius knew that; but he himself had also been in the right, when he refused to soil his fingers with the miserable dole that his father's will held out to him. No, he had left the whole booty to the

daylight thief, and gone forth, in the coat he wore, to escape from the furtive self-congratulations and the ironic condolences of the she-fox and her whelp, while he still had the strength to refrain from washing his hands in their blood. And so he had drifted from farm to farm, from stable to stable, from sewer to sewer, four long years now, always downwards, downwards, downwards. Oh, the pity of it! What would he not have done, how many homes would he not have brightened, how many wounded hearts would he not have healed with the precious gold that was now being swallowed up to feed a human doll's merciless vanity!

Four long years! He was getting so tired of it, the drudgery, the hungering, the humiliation. And yet, for the last week or two the world had not appeared so very impossible; and to-day, for the first time since he could remember, he felt hope bite into his soul with teeth that were not altogether blunt and futile. Surely, there must be some augury in this out-of-the-way meeting with his despoilers, whom he had never expected to hold speech with again. It must mean some momentous issue, some fateful climax—perhaps it portended the turning-point in his life that would at last bring him to the threshold of whatever happiness Providence had apportioned him. Ah, how he was wearying for a little happiness—all the more because it was so alluringly near to him, with scarcely an arm's length between them. Yes, it was quite true, this daughter of the despised race had bound him in fetters, had made him her vassal, and did not even seem conscious of her dominion. Now he saw why the men of this race remained so patient beneath the lash of their oppressors. They left it to their women folk to avenge them.

He looked at her. Her beauty seemed to grow over night; the radiance that had been hers yesterday, had to-day deepened into a veritable halo. She had brought with her a letter, the contents of which she and her father were discussing in that strange jargon of theirs; it probably contained welcome news, for they were talking eagerly, and even the rugged stolidness of Yossel's face was suffused with pleasure. Milkah was just going off, when she saw Sergius following her with wistful gaze. She had quite forgotten his presence, and now she turned back to him with a gesture half apologetic, and asked him pleasantly if the plaster had done his hand good. He thanked her with shining eyes, and just then the signal sounded to resume work. He could easily count the words she had addressed to him; but, few as they were, they were enough to make the very stones turn into songs of the gladness of life.

Milkah walked home quickly, clutching in her hand the letter in which her Baruch announced his coming that evening; he was going to stay with them over the Sabbath. And now she had to hurry to make suitable preparations for so acceptable a guest. She was to spare no expense—her father had given her permission to go to the length of a whole rouble. And so, absorbed in the problem of spending it to the best advantage, she did not hear the stealthily hurrying footsteps behind her, and stopped with a little cry of alarm as a shadow fell across her path, and a strange voice spoke at her elbow:

"What a time you have kept me waiting, to be sure."

She looked up, and her alarm did not diminish when she found who the speaker was. Young Feodor leered

down upon her with arch complacence, and his laugh twanged with a hateful pleasantry, as he continued:

"A whole hour nearly—I never waited so long for a woman in my life. You ought to feel highly complimented, little one."

"All the more reason why your Honor should not waste any more time on me," replied Milkah, airily. She had recovered herself; to show the fear she felt would be to increase the danger tenfold. And young Feodor's reputation as a danger to people of her sex and age did not rest entirely on calumny. She would fight him with his own weapons.

He took stock of her in a manner of impudent approval.

"Fortunately my time is my own, so I can waste or save it," he said; "and I don't think I am wasting it just now. Do you know what, little one? When that old reprobate, King Solomon, wrote that song about the sweetheart he would like, he must have meant you. And he was a pretty good judge from all accounts. Not that I am not. Here, let's kiss to our better acquaintance."

Deftly she eluded the threatened embrace. "I am not used to kissing men at such short notice," she laughed.

"And I can hardly ask you to make an exception with me," he laughed back, professing to humor her. Not too fast; he must throw his hook warily, the fish was worth careful trailing. Did he not say the afternoon would bring its own counsel? He stooped down to her, apparently struck by a sudden idea.

"I tell you what we shall do, little girl. At four I shall wait for you with my English pony trap down at the other end of the village—I know you wouldn't care to set the gossips' tongues wagging. We can take a spin along some shady by-ways I know of, and I promise you will be back again before the dad is home. Now, am I not considerate?"

"More than I deserve, but I can't come, my grandmother is ill; she may die any minute," she said, making for any loop-hole in her distress.

"Nonsense," he sneered; "a live lover is better than a half-dead grandmother all the world over. You know that yourself."

"Yes, but what if something happens while I am away?" she asked. "My father would beat me within an inch of my life."

His eyes gleamed cunningly. "If it comes to that," he said half under his breath, "why should you return at all? Listen, little one. Heaven never meant you to burrow through life in this mole's fashion, and that's why it sent me across your track. Follow me, and I vow you will never regret it. Why, the great Catherine herself was a mere village girl to begin with, and her beauty was nothing to yours."

Milkah laughed, though her heart trembled with indignation at the villainous words. "What, your Honor thinks there is a chance of my becoming an empress like her? In that case a year or two is scarcely too much in which to give the matter all the consideration due to it."

Feodor gnashed his teeth as he put on his blandest smile. But his honeyed phrases, his most winning

blandishments went the way of the wind. Milkah had found her line of defence, and clung to it desperately; and her peril was its own inspiration. And when she finally ran off, waving him a coquettish good-bye, he felt he had been fooled, but hardly dared resent the fooling, it had been done so cleverly. Besides he was fairly certain the last word would be his.

That evening Sergius departed from his usual habits, and did an underhand thing: he turned spy. Yossel went home an hour earlier, thereby forfeiting the day's earnings; that and the letter with which Milkah had made her appearance in the day bred in Sergius an unconquerable presentiment. He could not see what went on in Yossel's abode, because Yossel lived in the second story. But he waited outside, in the shadow of a neighboring shed, gazing up at the lighted window with fascinated eyes. Several times there fell upon it the silhouette of a figure that was neither Yossel's nor Milkah's. About ten o'clock Milkah came out, and not alone. She and the man passed down the street, and then the man put his arm round her waist and kissed her.

Sergius crept after them all the way and back again, till they re-entered the house. Then he went home to his own hut, nodding his head vacuously the whole of the time, as though he were signifying his unqualified assent to what somebody was whispering at his ear. But he answered no when Yossel asked him next morning whether he, too, had heard the unearthly yell which had startled all Ushansk out of its slumbers in the night.

IV

A week later found Sergius still occupied amidst the stone piles along the road. The fact did not surprise him, because he was scarcely aware of it. But then he was not aware of anything else either. The stones, upon which he had wrought such havoc, had avenged themselves upon him; they had entered into his soul, and had made it akin to them, they had petrified his brain, and had paralyzed his power of initiative. He seemed to himself a clock that ticked and ticked, but always pointed to the same hour and minute, and never ran out. And he wanted to run out badly, only he did not know how to. He had conceived a mortal horror that he had become immortal. In the morning he came to his work, and left it at evening, without feeling his life had moved forward an inch. During the first half of the week his heart had vibrated for a little while each day, and from that he guessed that Milkah had come—guessed, for he did not look round to make sure. But in the last day or two not even a momentary throb had stirred the stagnating monotony of his being, and from that he inferred that Milkah had not come. Perhaps she was ill; the conjecture received color from the troubled look on Yossel's face and the thoughtful taciturnity that took the place of his wonted cheeriness. Sergius did not ask; he doubted whether he still possessed sufficient command of language to frame the question.

But the next morning something occurred that compelled Sergius to gather in some of his fugitive faculties. A gendarme stepped up to him, asked if he

were one Sergius Kouranowich, and slipped a note into his hand. The note was from Feodor; it said:

"I shall wait for you between twelve and one to-day near the Church of the Three Bishops. Don't fail me. It will be well worth your while to come."

Gleefully almost Sergius gloated over the words. At last heaven had had pity upon him, and would make a man of him again. Something was needed to give him back the instinct for self-action, to rescue him from the spell which had atrophied his will-power, and had hamstrung his nerves. And now this message from young Feodor had come to set everything right. Feodor had sent for him to continue his contumelies, to exult over the unwary foe who had let himself be trapped by ambush. But one sneering word, one supercilious look, and he would not have time for a second. Sergius swore it, and looking at his sinewy hands, he knew it would not be his fault, if he perjured himself. After all, this was the last occasion whereon he would have to act on his own discretion. Once he had finished with young Feodor, other people would be good enough to map out his programme for all time to come.

So he reassured himself as he made his way to the place of meeting. Feodor was already there, walking up and down with short, staccato steps, which betrayed his impatience. He turned to Sergius with a wheedling air, and Sergius' heart sank, for that told him he had been baulked in his expectations.

"I am glad you came," fawned Feodor; "I have a little business in hand, and want your help."

Sergius gazed at him stolidly.

"It will be a hundred roubles in your pocket," continued Feodor, tentatively.

"And it won't be for chasing the flies off you," said Sergius, grimly.

Feodor laughed coaxingly. It was just as well to encourage Sergius in his good humor.

"It isn't quite so easy as that," he replied. "You will have to work for the money. I know your ideas about being beholden to no man . . . ."

"Out with your devil's job," rasped Sergius.

Feodor shrugged his shoulders, to conceal his confusion and alarm.

"You know the Jew-girl that comes to the works in the dinner hour."

Sergius became rigid. The other took his silence for assent.

"She is a sorceress, Sergius, and she has bewitched me. Since I set eyes on her, I don't know what rest means by day or by night. She drags me behind her, now with a short rope, and now with a long. More than a week has the cat-and-mouse game gone on, and it hurts frightfully to be the mouse. I must make an end of it, Sergius, or I shall die. Yes, Sergius, the Jew-girl must come to me, or I shall die. She will never come willingly, and so I must steal her. Will you help me?"

Sergius listened with pricked-up ears, laughing inwardly all the time. Why should he not feel glad? Here was a man taking upon himself, unsolicited, the trouble of avenging him. At last he had captured the thought for which he had been groping through all the darkness and starkness of his poor numbed brain. Vengeance on the Jew-girl—that was what he wanted to wake him from his unnatural, narcotic stupor, and

give him back his place in a world of sentient things. She had had her wicked way with him long enough. He would spare her as little as she had spared him. Why had she deliberately lied when he asked her the meaning of the ring she wore? Had she told him the truth then, there would still have been time to extricate himself from the mad folly, which presently took him in its deadly, octopus-like grip, and in the end crushed all the life out of him. No, she had preferred to dally with him, to dangle him on the long rope and the short rope, and now her ruin was upon her own head.

"Yes, I shall help you," he gave his decision.

Feodor's face brightened. "I was afraid you would refuse—you considered so long," he explained. "You see, friend Sergius, I shall be candid with you; there is a special reason why I want you. You are to be the decoy. This afternoon the old Jew, her father, will be called away on a fool's errand, and kept in good hands till all is over. You will go to her, tell her the old man has broken his leg, or anything else you like, and has sent for her. She will not suspect you, for as far as I gathered from her lips you and her father have struck up something of a friendship. Where the private forest path begins, there will be a cart and horse to take her to the district hospital, where, as you will tell her, her father has been carried by ambulance; a mile beyond I shall join you, and three miles further on there is the pretty little shooting-box I built myself last year. A simple but effective plan, eh, Sergius? I doubt whether Gortchakoff could have improved upon it."

"Or the Evil One himself," muttered Sergius, as, despite his resolve, his fists clenched while the glib villainy unfolded itself. He looked at the young schemer, and did not know whether he loved more dearly his revenge, or hated more mortally his avenger. But one thing he could not doubt, and that was that he had been drained dry of all shame, or else he would not have humiliated himself on any human pretext, into abetting this drone that stung, this butterfly that cankered and poisoned. It could bear no pain itself, it writhed and whined at any touch that was not a caress, but it gave no thought to the deadly working of its own venom, it took no count where its slaver might fall and fester. Well, let him wreak his worst on her; let him taint and corrupt and putrefy her, till she shuddered at her own self. That would serve a double purpose: it would slay her soul, and would house the slayer a thousand fathoms deeper, a thousand years longer, amid the torments of Tophet.

Feodor had been talking on smoothly, impressing upon Sergius the minor details of the plot, which the latter caught with half an ear. And suddenly he felt as though his better self were spitting him in the face for all this despicable trickery, and he turned sharply to go, knowing that if he stayed a moment longer his hands would be about Feodor's throat, and with Feodor he would strangle his one chance of regaining his manhood. The Jew-girl would triumph, and he would fall back into that dull, impotent clockwork stupor of his, without even the power to comfort himself with his own curses.

Feodor hurried after and overtook him. "Then I may rely on you?" he asked anxiously.

Sergius nodded.

"Here is your fee in advance, just to show that I trust you," said Feodor, with an awkward little laugh.

Roughly Sergius pushed aside the other's hand.

"Treble it, and give it to some honest priest to pray for us—we shall want as much praying for as we can get," he called back across his shoulder, as he hurried on. This was not how he wished to realize his revenge. He was wiser than to stultify it by cramping it into his pocket. It was a great and precious thing that could well afford to be its own recompense.

The afternoon dragged on leaden-footed. Never before had Sergius been possessed so strongly by his sense of immobility, of marking time without hearing his footfalls, without seeing his footprints. Great God, would nothing happen to tear a rent in this stifling, brooding eternity? Ah, yes, at last! A man came and brought Yossel a message, probably a fabrication of something that concerned his daughter, for in a moment he was doubling off as fast as his half-numbed legs could carry him, in the direction of his home. And on the road, at some convenient spot, he would be waylaid and secured—till all was over. Sergius thanked Feodor for the phrase; it covered everything, and saved the necessity for ugly specification. Had it not rung so persistently in his ears, he would for a certainty have followed and stayed this poor old fool now running so desperately to put his head into the noose. No, let him run, let him choke, anything to rub from off his face the smug, smooth contentment,

in which Sergius had begun to see a maddening, ironic contrast to the wild upheaval, the agonizing turbulence of his own heart.

So the plot was working. And as the time for him to play his part in it came near, the spirit of the adventure seized him. He rioted in its novelty. He had never acted the trickster, and he was curious how he would acquit himself as such. He did not make a brilliant beginning. Half way to Ushansk he met Milkah.

"Your father has met with an accident," he struggled to say, but the lie stuck in his throat.

"What brings you here so late?" he asked instead.

"I came hoping to meet you," she replied, her voice very unsteady.

"To meet me?" he echoed, shooting a swift glance at her in the waning twilight. He saw there were shadows under her eyes, a wan and suppliant look on her face, making him wonder how he could ever have considered as a grown up woman this child, a child seemingly in great pain, and yet too frightened to cry out.

"To meet me?" he said again, as he saw her hesitate.

"Yes, you, I could think of nobody else," she replied, speaking fast as though to make up for lost time; "you have made it manifest, more than once, that you wished me to look on you as a friend, and yours is not the air of a man who is easily moved to idle pretence. Sergius, help me to lift the trouble which has fallen over my young life."

He was glad of the gathering darkness, for he would have found it hard to explain the surprise, amuse-

ment, anger, which he felt chasing each other across his features. This was taking the bull by the horns with a vengeance. But the piteous, impassioned words, in which she set forth the story of Feodor's importunity left him cold; it was as much as he could do not to cut her short impatiently.

"He will kill me, he will kill himself, he will kill everybody, he says," she continued, keeping back her sobs. "For the last three days I have been a prisoner in the house; I dare not show myself outside, because he tracks me like a sleuth-hound. Even now he is probably on my heels."

"But what can I do on your behalf?" asked Sergius, with something like a crocodile tear in his voice. For a novice in chicanery he was doing uncommonly well. But somehow he did not love himself any the better for it.

"You can do the only thing possible," she said eagerly. "Speak to him for me; you seem to know each other well; father told me that last week you conversed together for a long time and in the manner of men of equal station. Perhaps you could prevail upon him to leave me in peace. He is angry with me, because he has learnt to love me; but did I do anything to teach him? I did not send for him; he met me as he might meet a thousand other strangers. And he ought not to have been so improvident as to let his heart go from him, before he had a fair hope of getting mine in return; but let him search in all the crevices of his memory whether by word or sign I ever gave him warrant for such a hope. He told me he would either have my love or my life, nothing else would

content him. My love he cannot have, because that already belongs, and always will belong, to some one else. Well, then, let him take my life. But, Sergius, I would keep my life also, if I only can; I am still so young, and I have a great deal of happiness waiting for me. So save me, Sergius; I have no one else to look to."

Sergius listened, and forgot that he was only to be the messenger of her words, not the recipient. So he let them sink deep down into his heart, for they applied more truthfully to him than to that other one. But what he heard of them was not so much their pitifulness, as their irrefutable justice. In the name, then, of heaven's eternal righteousness, he would be just to her. And to himself, too. He would misconstrue himself no longer. What he had mistaken for insensate hatred was merely his love racked beyond the straining-point. But it was love nevertheless, and he would prove it to himself, and to anybody who doubted it, by saving her, by preserving her for the happiness to which she was looking with such childlike wistfulness.

"I was thinking what is to be done," he palliated his long silence. "Suppose you went away from here and . . . ."

"He warned me against that," she interrupted quickly; "he would only have to look down the index of the passport register in his step-father's office to know where we had attempted to hide ourselves. And then he would hound me down."

"Well, then, I must try my own way," said Sergius, half to himself.

Milkah, however, had caught the words, and with a

glad cry of gratitude, she snatched his hands in hers, and was about to raise them to her lips; but he forestalled her. In a moment he was down on his knees before her, and, muttering inarticulately, pressing his mouth to her hands, till Milkah thought he meant to burn a hole in them right through to the palms. Then he leapt to his feet, moved off a pace or two, and then, coming back close to her, said solemnly:

"Yes, I shall save you, and, by token of it, you will never see me again. But you must be grateful to me, and that, by being as happy as you can. The happier you are, the more you will justify me, the stronger you will make my claims to redemption. And may God give you understanding."

With that he disappeared, vanishing into the darkness noiseless as a wraith. Milkah remained rooted to the spot, her breath flying, her chest heaving, pondering, puzzling over the strange words with which he had made his farewell. It troubled her that they should convey nothing to her when evidently they meant such a great deal to him. But though he said she would never see him again, perhaps she would hear from him, and then she would ask. Half comforted she was just turning homeward, when, across the gloom-shrouded distance, came the same eerie, inhuman shout that had made her blood run cold with terror some nights ago. So it was he who chose to amuse himself in this fashion. And instead of being startled, as she had been before, she laughed to herself in the fulness of her reassurance. A man who could shout like that, and withal grovelled at your feet and kissed your hands, it was good and desirable to have such a man for your champion.

V

The world never learnt the ins and outs of the circumstances attending the atrocity whereby the Prefect's promising young step-son met with his terrible death that same night. That it was a case of deliberate murder there could not be the slightest doubt. He was found the next morning at the bottom of the promontory where the quarry-side overhung most steeply the valley beneath. His hands and feet had been pinioned. He lay amid the debris of a horse and cart from the Prefect's stable and the remains of a man of gigantic stature, to whom evidenly the foul deed had to be ascribed. This man had worked as one of the road navvies, but beyond that nothing was known about him, except that he was possessed of remarkable strength. Mylady's nerves did not permit her to attend the inquiry, and so the most obvious motive for the crime, the motive of revenge, was not suggested. But although the inward truth of the matter was left open to conjecture, the more immediate details connected with the perpetration of the deed could be fairly pieced together. It appeared from the account of one of the stablemen in the Prefect's employ, that he had been ordered by the young master to be in readiness with the cart and horse in question at the entrance to the private forest path, where he was to wait for two passengers, one a man, the other a young woman. The man alone had appeared, frothing at the mouth and a maniac look in his eyes. Before the stableman could remonstrate, the frothing man had leapt to the box-seat, seized the reins, and was whipping the horse into

a furious gallop. The groom then had hurried home to lay information against one whom at the time he did not consider anything more than an impudent thief. After that the tale was taken up by a charcoal burner, roused about midnight by a tremendous clatter of wheels, above which cries for help could be plainly distinguished. The wan rays of the new moon showed a figure in the body of the cart struggling to free itself from the cords in which it was bound, with the driver laughing horribly at its ineffectual efforts. But before one could make sure that it was nothing more than a nightmare, the whole thing had dashed out of sight. The final link, and the most important, because it complicated the mystery, was furnished by a decrepit, half paralyzed old loafer, who had made his home in one of the caves of the hillside, and lived from the fragments of food and a chance copeck flung him by the quarrymen. He had crawled out of his cave, just as the miscreant had jumped down to clap the blinkers tightly to the eyes of the rearing horse, while shouting at the top of his voice: "You said you must have her or die; and as you cannot have her, you must, as a man of honor, do the other thing." Something else he said also, as he backed the cart for the deadly leap—something about falling soft, for the devil was down below by appointment waiting to catch them with open arms. But about this last the witness was not certain. The statement of several of the quarrymen, who remembered the murderer standing some days ago on the uttermost spur of the rock, looking into the depth as though he were reconnoitering, was not considered of any importance. The one person to whose

advantage the thing chiefly redounded was Maryashka, the fortune-teller. The accurate consummation of her happy guess, predicting a violent end to young Feodor and the simultaneous death of his murderer, brought her an overwhelming custom, and all the other magicians and necromancers for a hundred miles round went bankrupt.

For seven days and nights Milkah tossed on her couch, crying to God what had been her offence that the fates of two strange lives should be thus burdened upon her soul. Then, when the fever had burnt itself out of her bones, and her reason came back to her, she realized the meaning of her rescuer's dying request. God had fulfilled his prayer, and had given her the necessary understanding. He wanted her to be happy, because he had died—and had killed—to make her so. If she allowed the bitterness of it to rest on her mind, and ate her heart out of herself with its misery, his sacrifice and his sin would be rendered void and profitless. Her happiness would be the achievement to which he would be able to point on Judgment Day as the redeeming merit of his life; in that lay his only atonement. And she swore that, as far as it rested with her, she would help him to that atonement. In that vow her husband Baruch assisted her loyally. And their only child, Sergius, had no need to be told the story of his namesake to know how much the ultimate keeping of the vow depended on him.

Among the first to use the new road when completed was Mylady, the Prefect's wife. She travelled upon it in eloping with her Colonel of Cossacks. When, however, the Colonel discovered that the hair

and teeth about which he had been so dithyrambic, had belonged to somebody else before her, he sent her back to the Prefect with a polite note, explaining that the whole thing had been a mistake. The Prefect took the explanation and his wife in the same spirit of pleasantry in which they had been sent. But her escapade had cost Mylady her name, and though she now had a beautifully short cut to the Governor's palace, she did not get there even by the longest; for, having become socially impossible, she had ceased to figure on the list of invitations.

THE BROKEN PANE

THE judge sat in his study. The day's work had been unusually heavy; sundry poachers, smugglers, horse-thieves, a political offender or two, had come up before his tribunal, and he had done his duty conscientiously. That was why he now felt so comfortable as he lounged in his grandfather-chair, wrapped in his soft, voluminous dressing-gown, warming his feet at the bright blaze in the grate. It was only mid-autumn, but he was growing old, and his blood ran sluggishly, as if it were getting tired of the routine.

On the table stood the tall reading lamp, burning quietly under its green shade. But suddenly the straight, steady flare broke into a momentary flicker, and the heavy damask curtains at the window swayed lightly, as if unseen fingers were playing with them. Then the lamp sputtered more violently, and the drapery moved with gently widening curves. The judge looked up; what did this mean? He felt a distinct gust of wind blowing into the room in a volume of chill night air. Ah, he knew—a pane in the window had got broken, his little son Rudolph had driven the bolt of his cross-bow through it that morning. A smile relaxed the set lips of the judge as he thought of the little fellow's tears at the mischief he had done—how the boy would not be soothed till his father, on his way out to the court-house, had lifted him up and kissed him, and, for stronger evidence of

forgiveness, had presented him with a shining silver rouble. He had ordered old Sebastian to see that the window was mended during the day, and the stupid rascal had evidently forgotten. With an angry frown, the judge reached for the bell-rope; but just as it was about to give tongue, his arm stiffened and stopped motionless—something seemed to hold it back—a sudden thought—a memory. His fist clenched as if he had caught something, and would not let it go. The pale, silent-eyed ghost of the past had brushed by him, and now he was clutching it by the skirts——

Had it not all begun with a broken pane, and at this season of the year? That was why the old Jewish vagrant had pleaded so earnestly that day to be let off, so that he might not be deprived of his supplications for an auspicious year, with plenty of undetected pilferings. The judge laughed to himself—a broken pane! How ignoble it sounded. Had he had his will, he would have chosen something more heroic for the pivot of his life. Providence stooping to the disguise of a broken pane of glass! No wonder people had so little respect for Providence.

He was a little boy again—ten, eleven years old It was the eve of the New Year—his father and brothers, looking spruce and clean, were coming from the house on their way to the Evening Service.

"Come to prayers, you godless little imp," he remembered his father saying, "unless you would begin the New Year with broken bones."

"I shall be there as soon as you," the little boy had answered, pretending to be very busy collecting a basket of peat for the kitchen. And then, having

watched his father out of sight, he went back to his real business, which, out of deference to his father's feelings, he had momentarily intermitted. It cannot be maintained that the business in question was more important than going to synagogue, but for Jacob, that is the little boy, it had much more fascination. He was stoning the weathercock.

The said weathercock had its perch on the gable of the house wherein Jacob and his folk lived. Jacob hated it, from pure jealousy—it looked so irritatingly irresponsible, it could turn this way and that without protest from any one, its life was not pent up between morning and evening prayers, nor squeezed flat between the pages of Rashi's Commentaries. And, therefore, to infuse a little sorrow into its existence, Jacob threw stones at it on every occasion. Nine times out of ten he missed it, and the weathercock swung round and round creaking, and Jacob thought it said: "You silly little Jew boy"; and the tenth time, when it was hit, its brass pennon swung on just the same, with a lordly unconcern, which annoyed Jacob more than to be called a silly Jew boy.

This afternoon he had been more than usually unsuccessful—the weathercock seemed invulnerable. But Jacob was determined not to be beaten, and that was why he sought a pretence for not following his father immediately. At last he grew desperate; from the synagogue at the back rose the Declaration of the Unity, it was getting very dark, too—just one more missile, and he would have done. Carefully he poised his throw, took steady aim, let loose and crash—! Jacob felt a shiver wriggle down his back; what had

happened? Yes, there was no doubt of it, he had broken a window, the solitary window of the dingy sitting-room where the family took their meals on great occasions.

A nameless horror took hold of the boy. He dared not face his father after this—his stern, loveless father, who had always made him a scapegoat, who would lift him up by the ears, and throw him on the ground, and strike him with his cobbler's strap—first, for not coming to synagogue, secondly, for committing breakage on a holiday, which was a greater sin, thirdly, for causing an unnecessary expense of twenty copecks, which was the greatest. And as the catalogue of his indictments rose before the boy's eyes, he started away with a shriek, and ran as if an army of fiends with cobblers' straps in their hands were pursuing him.

The squalid Jew-quarter lay by now far behind, and he was still running, his head dazed and bewildered by the labyrinthine streets of the great city, his chest heaving, his eyes staring wildly. Whither was he running? He knew not—he cared not—only away from the hard, pitiless face of his father and the whizzing sting of his leather thong. Suddenly he felt something touch him on the shoulder, and he flung himself to earth with a howl of terror.

"Spare me, father, spare me—only this once," he shrieked.

"Get up, I mean you no harm," said a strange voice, and a hand stroked his head almost caressingly. And when he looked up, he saw before him a man in a long cassock, who was gazing at him compassionately.

"You are frightened—you are fleeing some danger

—tell me all; you are safe with me," he said again.

In eager haste and with many a backward glance of dread, Jacob told him what had happened, his tongue lapsing now and again into his Ghetto gibberish. "If I go back now," he sobbed, "I shall be half flayed, and thrust into the cellar over night—oh!" A greenish look crept over his little sallow face, and he reeled and tottered like a drunken man.

"Starving, as I live," muttered the cassock-man, looking at him closely; and with that he stooped and lifted the boy in his arms—the burden was pitifully light. Then he strode on, and by the time he was entering a doorway Jacob had so far recovered as to raise his head.

"What is that?" he asked, pointing to a gilded wooden figure on a cross that hung at the side of the entrance.

"That? That is my doorpost amulet," answered the cassock-man, hastily, "like the one you have at home."

"But it is not like ours," insisted Jacob; "yours is wood, and ours is a tin capsule with an opening through which the eye of God peeps into the house—so I have heard our Rabbi say; but perhaps yours is a newer make."

"A newer make, indeed," said the other, slowly, "but one that shall endure when your tin capsule is eaten by rust."

"The Rabbi says there is a soul in each capsule, and when the tin gets rust-eaten, the soul goes into a new capsule, and so on as long as the world shall last."

Jacob shrank back, because the eyes of the man, which had till now looked so mild and loving, seemed to blaze with a terrible fire; but only for an instant.

"You know not what you are saying," said the man in his soft voice, when they had entered. "Come and eat, your body needs tending first." Quickly he set before Jacob all manner of eatables, and Jacob did not stop to inquire into their nature. He thought he was in Eden Garden, and was feasting on the leviathan, which is the regular bill of fare in the place. He had fasted all day, because his mother thought it fitting one should grow a greater appetite for the greater glory of the festival. The man sat watching him in silence, and by and by, when Jacob had ceased to eat, and his eyes grew heavy with the weight of sleep, he took him by the hand to lead him from the chamber, and Jacob's heart sank as he thought he would now have to go forth into the cold night, and sleep on the stones, with evil spirits and other horrors to keep him company. But no, the man took him to a little room, wherein stood a bed, all white-sheeted and raised from the floor on four legs, and Jacob had just time to think it was probably too high to be reached by the cockroaches that used to come swarming over his straw pallet near the kitchen hearth, before he was fast asleep. But long afterwards he wondered at the strange dream that had come to him that night: he had wandered into the midst of a large plain, at one end of which stood his father with a Scroll of the Law uplifted in his hands, and at the other the cassock-man raised aloft the gilded figure on the cross; and Jacob looked from one to the other, and gradually the

Law-scroll dwindled away to the size of a tin capsule, while the wooden figure waxed till it overshadowed all the plain, and then, opening its arms, caught him fast in its embrace.

So it had all begun—his life in the priest's house, the acquiring of strange knowledge, the struggle between the old bonds of blood and the enticements of his new home. Once, and once only, did the former triumph. It was on the fifth anniversary of his flight, when the idle curiosity he still felt concerning the fate of his people grew to a mighty longing. So he stole out into the dark, threaded his way, as if by instinct, among the Ghetto streets, until he stood before his father's house. Stealthily he crept up the ladder placed at the side of the window, and peeped into the room: there they all sat round the little table —father, mother, brothers, sisters, eating and making merry as though they had no cause for sorrow in the world. A jealous anger swept through his bosom: they did not miss him—the gap had been filled, the pane had been mended. Silently he crept down again with his resolve firm in his heart. Overhead his old enemy, the weathercock, swung and creaked, but it no longer seemed to say: "You silly little Jew boy." It now said: "Wladimir, Wladimir, what a fine name we have to be sure!"

And then he hastened away, wondering why a sudden rush of blood should make his cheeks tingle so hotly through the darkness.

Thenceforth he lived only for his work, and he wrought miracles of toil and application. However hard his fellow-students strove, he outstripped them all, and

forged ahead as though possessed of ten men's strength. But in his own heart he knew the spring and motive of his restless zeal. Every grain of learning, every atom of knowledge, was a boulder for the building of the great barrier-wall that was to sunder him from the other side of his life, and all it once contained. And for a greater precaution he let his heart turn to a block of lead, so that if ever he were tempted to scale that wall, it would drag him down again before he could achieve his attempt.

And then he made for the goal to which his talent and ambition were to carry him, and he succeeded even beyond his own hopes. He stepped from post to post, making one office the vaulting-board from which to reach the next. At last they made him a judge, and there he stopped, for he was growing aghast at his own greatness. After all, he could not get rid of his pariah-instinct, he could not entirely forget the runaway little Jew boy whom the kind-hearted priest had taken for his son, to whom he had given his love, his wealth, his knowledge—and from whom he had taken in return nothing but his belief: on whose side had been the bargain?

He asked himself the question many a time—one day he got his answer. It was brought to him, as he sat on his tribunal, by two men, draggle-tailed, shaggy-haired, reeking with the squalor of their poverty. Oh! he knew what it was to be Joseph in Egypt —he recognized them at once: these two men were his brothers.

"Why have we smuggled?" they whined. "Because our father lay dying, and we had nothing where-

with to allay his sufferings, and we risked life and liberty to make his death-bed easier."

So he was dead, the stern, sullen-hearted man, and here were his brothers—the living types of what he himself would have been but for that broken pane. "Risked life and liberty?" No, the law of the land must not be transgressed. But as he stood outside the penance chamber, and listened to the swishing of the lash and the cries of the culprits, a feeling came over him as if his soul were being bastinadoed by proxy. True, he made amends to them, but without owning to his action, and he took no credit for it—he knew it was no better than throwing a bone to a dog after one has kicked him.

Certainly, he was now a great judge, and judged God's creatures according to his wisdom. He himself would one day stand before the Judgment seat of the Greater and Greatest Judge, and what would His verdict be? Sometimes he thought God and he were colleagues, two of a trade, as it were, and that, therefore, he was entitled to a discount in his sentence. It was an impious thought, a sacrilegious jest; but then he had laughed at so many things; one laugh more or less——

Whew! the wind came through the broken pane with an angry gust. Had it blown the lamp out? The judge felt everything getting so dark and cold. He staggered up from his seat, fumbling for the bell-cord —he would summon Sebastian to take him to bed— or no, he would rather go and kiss his little Rudolph ——what was that? There was a short, sharp stab going like a rapier through his body; it seemed to

him as if a splinter of the pane he had broken so many long years ago was being driven through his bosom with quick, clean thrusts—surely, nothing else could stab like that—could stab again and again until——

The stars of the night looked at him as he lay there rigid and silent: then they turned to one another and said, reassuringly: "True, we, too, are but windows—the windows of the sky; yet let us not fear—no one shall break us: are we not made of adamant?"

THE LEADER

GEROLD GAVRILOF'S bachelor quarters were comfortable enough at all times; they looked especially so this drab autumn afternoon already fringed with the twilight. For the last half-hour their proprietor and his visitor had been occupying two of the comfortable, soporific arm-chairs, which, perhaps, was the reason why the conversation had refused to come into proper swing. And yet Saul Mogilev was good company as a rule; he had to be, or else he would hot have been on visiting terms with Gerold Gavrilof. For Gerold did not hold himself cheap; he was blessed with plenty of the world's goods, as his surroundings testified, and could afford to be, and insisted on being, eclectic in the matter of his acquaintances.

"You seem to have left your tongue at home, Saul," he said, wearying of the slow drag of their word interchange.

"I am sorry," was the answer. "I know I must appear dull to you; I would not have come at all to-day, had you not pressed me."

"What is it? Another discovery that is going to electrify the world? For mercy's sake leave off telling us humiliating facts about this poor human mechanism of ours. You do your best to show us what worms we are, and we, in return, call you a great man. The exchange is hardly fair."

Saul smiled. "You are safe against that, at least,

for the next two days," he replied. "I am taking a rest."

"Is that so? Then you are in my hands. You won't feel dull much longer. We dine together this evening, and then the theatre—there's that new French play everybody is talking about——"

He stopped as he saw Saul shaking his head.

"Not the theatre?" he went on. "Well, then, the *soirée* at Von Kuno's, the Censor; he is anxious to make your acquaintance."

"Thank you, Gerold," said Saul, "but don't take offence; I want my holiday all to myself."

"I see, you are going into the country."

"No, I am stopping in town."

Gerold sat up. "What's the mystery? Out with it."

"I did not intend to make a mystery of it," said Saul, quietly; "to-morrow—this evening rather, our New Year begins."

Gerold looked blank; then he laughed. "An eccentricity of the calendar, certainly, but that still does not explain anything."

"I have always observed these days as a time for self-searching and introspection," continued Saul, slowly, as though to drive home to his friend every syllable. "Had you not told me you were born in my faith, I should not have left so much to implication."

"I remember now," said Gerold; "this is the time when Heaven is turned into a counting-house and all the angels into book-keepers, and there is much traffic in transgressions and forgiveness."

Saul ignored his friend's levity. "These days mean much to me," he said pensively; "they call to me from the turmoil of the world, and sanctify my petty strivings, my ignoble ambitions; they remind me that, after all, there is a greater purpose and a wider issue for which I must work. They are the incentive that spurs me on when I flag, and have time to take stock and measure of the vanity of it all. And, further, there is their human aspect: they are the links—the only links, perhaps—that tie me to my race, and make me part and parcel of its destiny."

"Links, you say?" asked Gerold, taking his tone from the other. "Call them fetters, and instead of destiny say doom. For a matter of tawdry sentiment, which is all it comes to, you are content to cramp your talents into the narrowest scope, to hamper yourself with obstacles voluntary and of your own making. I tell you, you are acting criminally; you, who are called to higher things, to work for the weal of mankind, you have no right to be of a section. The world claims you—that is the call you should follow."

"And you?" asked Saul, looking smilingly at his friend.

"I? I am a nonentity, the ordinary rank-and-file specimen; it does not matter a straw to whom I belong. The little I could do would work no good and no ill. That is why I have not broken away entirely from my race. I have only made my concessions: Gershon Gabrielovitch became Gerold Gavrilof. I have, moreover, refrained from flaunting my origin in people's faces. The old trunk still owns me as one of its shoots; I wish it joy of the possession. But you,

you have wrestled with the giantess Nature, you have wrested her secrets from her, and now you go on repeating to yourself old women's tales. I have no patience with you."

"At least one of those old women was a heroine," said Saul, with a twitching of his lip and a moisture in his eyes.

"From that it does not follow that she was the mother of a hero," replied Gerold, soberly. "You are not a hero to me, Saul; you shrink from tearing the mask from falsehoods, because they happen to be time-honored, and because you don't want to know what the truth is like. And your reason for that is a knock-kneed sentimentalism that prevents you from walking through life firm and upright, your head the height of the world's head. Or, at the best, you may dub yourself martyr, and between him and the fool there is frequently only the difference of a stiff neck."

"Coward or fool?" said Saul, his eyes gleaming brightly, perhaps with the after-sheen of the vanished tear. "At least you give me the benefit of the doubt, which only puts you to the trouble of listening to my defence on both counts. Well, let the coward have the first turn. A band of harassed, hunted weaklings are encamped in the wilderness. At night time they sit shivering in fearful wonder when the unseen hand will strike next out of the darkness; and yet they dread the daylight, for that only makes them more surely the target of their enemies. Few among them have weapons; and these, whom they look upon as their protection and rampart, these are assailed by the honeyed blandishments of the foe, deadlier than his

deadliest darts. 'Come to us,' he says, 'give up the thankless task of battling for a lost cause. Ours is the victory; come quickly, or you will perish with their peril.' One of the champions goes, the other stops at his appointed post. Say, Gerold, who is the coward, the steadfast or the renegade?"

Gerold was silent, but his brows contracted with displeasure.

"Now for the fool," went on Saul, dispassionately. "You will see, Gerold, that I am not so improvident as you think me. I know how to recoup myself for my self-sacrifice. Shall I admit it? There is much selfishness in my folly. By holding to my people I also partake of their heritage. I can claim my share in the glory of their mission——"

"Mission?" broke in Gerold with a sneer. "It spells omission nowadays; they have no time, no bent for anything save their worldly interests, their heaping of gold."

"Yes, that is the taunt of our enemies," replied Saul, calmly; "and to some of us—I am not reproaching you, Gerold—it means the excuse for secession. And yet nothing can prove our ultimate purpose more manifestly. To the lowliest of God's creatures has been given some shield, some armor against its adversaries. What if we were a people of beggars—would we have survived? If Israel is heaping gold, it is piling it into the bulwarks, behind which it is biding its time, till the hearts of men shall beat more lovingly together, till the vultures of strife and hatred shall have ravaged their talons into bluntness, and then, at God's beck, we shall sally forth, and our lips shall

utter loudly and fearlessly the burden of our apostleship."

"And meantime," asked Gerold, with a shoulder-shrug, "you are staking your hope of reward on the future which you will not live to see?"

"Meantime I have my belief in the special Providence that is our guardian, and that means belief in self and confidence of achievement. Faith is a tonic which you can buy of no apothecary."

"It is a little out of fashion, though; and no wonder, considering it was patented some thousands of years ago," said Gerold, lightly. "Its virtues lie chiefly in the imagination; the only reality about it is its defects. There is no faith; there is only cant, and narrowness, and bigotry."

"I can but speak for myself," said Saul.

"Not even for yourself," returned Gerold, hotly; "you are mistaken in your own mind. Look with your eyes, use your judgment, your better judgment I call it. Live for yourself, not for a shadow, a delusion. Do it, if not for your own sake, at least for mine."

Saul looked at him astonished. "I don't understand," he said at length.

Gerold hesitated a full minute; then the answer wrenched itself from his lips:

"Because, if you do not, there is no friendship possible between us."

"You jest," said Saul, starting up.

"Unhappily, I do not," replied Gerold, his eyes seeking the ground; "I cannot tell you why, but I cannot feel at home with men whose opinions are not

in concert with mine. I cannot bear the thought that, while our hands clasp each other in brotherhood, there is between our hearts an abyss wherein, suddenly and without warning, our friendship may one day become engulfed. It is best we should sunder our ways betimes; we shall save ourselves much heart-ache in the end."

Saul got up and strode over to him. "I guessed something of this," he said, with a tremor in his voice, "and, therefore, I have kept my lips closed on this all these months we have known each other; but for my unfortunate reference it might never——"

"Impossible," said Gerold; "it would have come our way later on, when our hearts had become still more closely knitted, and the agony would have been greater. Believe me, it is better so."

"Look, Gerold," said Saul, after a pause, his hand on the other's shoulder; "you said that faith was narrowness, and now you let your own action belie your words. I that am narrow can bear with you as you are. I make no attempt to bring you into line with me. But you who make a principle of your want of bias, your breadth of view, have no room to house these puny self-delusions of mine; what am I to think?"

"Think what you like—that I am a whimsical fool, whose humors play fast and loose with him. Saul, I am willing to accept the humiliation: treat me as a child, and give way to me. Show how great you are; show yourself the hero: follow me!"

"Gain a friend and lose Heaven?" replied Saul, half-aloud. "No, Gerold, you ask too much. Let it

be as you say: our ways shall lie apart. One day my good fortune may make them to cross each other again. Till then, good-bye."

Softly he walked to the door, and stopped for a moment with his hand on the latch, as though he half expected to be called back. But Gerold sat on, his head low down on his chest, immovable, as if he had suddenly lost all power of motion. Long after Saul's departure he fancied he could still hear his footsteps descend the staircase, slowly and reverently, as though he were walking away from a grave. For a moment an irresistible desire had seized on Gerold to hurry after his friend, to drag him back and ask his forgiveness. But his resolve had held him back, his resolve that had been slowly shaping itself all through their colloquy, and the motive of which he must keep secret from Saul. Could he tell him of the vague, nameless jealousy that was beginning to tinge their intercourse with wormwood? Their friendship was only six months old, and it was as full-grown as though it had a score of years to its credit. By mere accident Gerold had met the brilliant young physiologist, who, despite his youth, had already made considerable stir in scientific circles. He had recognized in him a nature to which guile and falsehood were strange, and he revelled in his company, which came to him like the pure breath of Heaven after the foul atmosphere of mercenary associates and grovelling sycophants, in which he had moved all his life. That was all the benefit which had accrued to him from his wealth, from the miles and miles of forest, from the countless acres of pasture and plough-land his father

had left him. Ever since his tenth year he had been in the hands of strangers, who allowed him to drift as he pleased, till he had drifted away from everybody, and his solitude hedged him in as with a wall of ice, which no one had completely succeeded in crossing. But when he looked into Saul's face for the first time, he felt his heart become alive and warm, and with its warmth the ring of ice melted, and through the breach Saul stepped into his life.

And now his fate, which had destined him to an existence lonely and self-contained, seemed to track him further. He had admired his friend, he had triumphed in his triumphs; not a shadow of envy lurked in his heart because the other had been chosen for a higher sphere than he himself could ever hope to attain—not till this unhappy hour. Was Saul not sufficiently dowered with the gifts which mere wealth could not buy? Was his life not full and complete enough with the joy of endeavor, with the certainty of attainment? And now came the revelation of Saul's inner life, of that soul-sustaining, heart-gladdening activity which he kept for his own use and benefit, and of which he gave no toll to the world. For that, at least, one had no need to be a genius, and yet Gerold felt that it had likewise been placed beyond his reach. And so that jealous rage had come over him, which had to be vented—as though it were the madness of revenge—on that unseen Power which had treated him with such cruel injustice; and he had gratified it in suicidal perverseness, for he could strike the enemy only through his own heart. He thought he saw now why the world was so dead and empty for

him; he had not been given the sense of touch wherewith to feel the vivifying essence which must animate it; his ear was deaf to the great pulse that vibrated and spread order and harmony through the chaotic void.

Sick at heart and dizzy of brain, he stumbled through the darkness into the open. He made an attempt at a meal in the café; it was an ignominious failure. He sauntered about till the theatres opened, and sought to find distraction in the new play, which he had anticipated with much eagerness. Two acts were enough for him, although the house was enthusiastic; he could not follow the thread of the action; the figures on the stage were mere silhouettes; they talked gibberish. On his way he passed Von Kuno's house, brilliantly lighted up and lined with an interminable length of equipages. He was glad he was not in evening dress, and so could save himself the trouble of even deliberating whether he should join the gay throng. When he reached home, he found waiting for him a perfumed note from Madame Councillor Rothman, wherein she desired the favor of his company at tea that evening—quite *en famille*—only she and her daughter would be present. With a grimace of disgust he tore the missive into shreds. How tired he felt of it all—the artificiality, the hollowness, the shallowness, the surface-smiles. His heart had been beginning to beat true, and in tune with itself, because deft fingers had been playing upon it, and now it would be thrown back into the old jar and jangle and discord. If only he could sleep—a natural sleep, not this numbed, narcotic languishing which lay like lead in all his limbs. And as he tossed restlessly

through the long and ever-lengthening night, a suggestion entered his head, as yet dim and undefined, because it seemed so strange and purposeless; for he could hardly trust himself that it would survive its conception. And yet it grew steadily, developing in fulness and strength, and by the morning it had taken to itself shape and substance.

About ten o'clock he sallied forth towards the synagogue where he knew Saul worshipped. He had accompanied him there once before, only as far as the entrance of course, when Saul was commemorating the anniversary of his mother's death. On the pretence of being a newspaper reporter, Gerold gained admission. Near the door he stopped and surveyed the scene. He had never witnessed the like before. Never before had he seen that look of joyous resignation, of submissive hopefulness, on human countenances. It came home to him, in a flash of comprehension, that if he had more often had occasion and opportunity to see his discarded brethren thus lifting themselves above their ordinary, everyday selves, he would have been more slow to set them down for a brood of crawling groundlings, of dust-eating self-seekers. Were they merely that, they would not bear on their faces this pride of race, the memory of their traditions, the impress of quiet grandeur stamped upon them by pain-quivering centuries. They knew and felt who they were; but they guarded their self-knowledge zealously, for to divulge it would be sacrilege.

So the service went on, solemn and more solemn still, until Gerold felt a shiver tingle through him from crown to foot. Loud and long and resonant

rang out the blast of the ram's horn. Gerold had not heard it since his childhood, but he remembered how his frightened hand had sought his father's, to assure himself of some protecting presence in the midst of this strange alarm. And again, despite the long interval, the same feeling took hold of him, the urgent craving for kith and kindred, the desire to be part of a whole, to merge himself indissolubly, so that he might never again stand alone. That was, no doubt, the call of which Saul had spoken, the call to summon the stragglers back to the fold, to remind all Israel that its salvation lay in its unity. And now that he listened to it, it seemed to him so easy to answer its bidding; it drew him gently, lovingly, for it had touched a long-slumbering echo in his heart, and had stirred it mightily into life. Why had he come to the synagogue? What had been his purpose? He had hardly known: but dimly, divinely he had fathomed that one need only set out on his quest for light, and sooner or later God would hold out to him His beacon.

Curiously the adjoining worshippers glanced at his rigid figure, as he stood there like one petrified, his eyes raised aloft, his lips set as in a vice. So he remained, till a sudden commotion told him the service was over. He was among the first to leave; outside in the courtyard he turned and waited; he was waiting for Saul; he had something to tell him. And presently he saw the tall, stoop-shouldered form of his friend issuing. Quickly he went up to him, seized him by the hand, and whispered:

"Saul, if you cannot follow, will you lead?"

RABBI ELCHANAN'S QUEST

THE words of Rabbi Elchanan, the son of Aaron the Levite, unto Riffka, daughter of Baruch the Scribe:—

Peace and greeting unto thee, O bride of my youth, main-stay of my manhood, comforter of my old age. Whereas Leyb Tchariner, thy kinsman, has handed to me a letter written at thy dictate and over thy name—for thou art thyself no expert in penmanship, despite the cunning of thy father—what says the proverb? "The children of shoemakers go barefoot"—the letter wherein thou inquirest concerning me, and makest great lamentation that since the day I set foot from our threshold no tidings have reached thee of my well-being. And at sight and perusal thereof my soul lifted her hands in repentance. For as thou sayest, it is truly spoken: seven portions of the Law have been read, and on the coming Sabbath shall be uttered the third Benediction of the New Moon, since what time I started forth to sojourn amongst strangers; the cause thereof being, as thou well knowest, the gathering of a marriage-portion for our daughter, the sole and single issue of our love—may God make her like unto Sarah, Rachel, and Leah, her forebears. And verily, were it not for that, I should have returned long ere this, for one endures hardship and tribulation in dwelling among men of alien speech and customs. But the matter proceeds somewhat tardily, and it is because my mind is ever intent upon the achieving thereof that

my hand has been turned aside from the admonishings of my heart. Now, however, open thine ears unto the tale of my wanderings; for it shall be set forth in all detail, both my pilgrimage and all that appertains unto my quest.

It was upon the third day after Pentecost, if my memory serves me truly, that I girded up my aged loins to make adventure into the land of Britannia, whereof, as report says with truth, a woman is the ruler, a land lying towards the sinking of the sun. And further I remember how my going forth laid a gloom upon thy soul, and how thou didst endeavor vainly to clutch me by the caftan, and hold me back with much shrieking and wringing of hands, until the women surrounded thee, and conveyed thee to thy couch, whereon thou didst lie, a swoon holding thy senses captive. And as I turned me and gazed back, behold, methought that my house—to compare small things to great—seemed likest to Yerusholayim upon the day of its destruction. But wherefore didst thou afflict thy soul? Knowest thou not that God is ever at the right hand of the righteous, and maketh clear his path from the ambushes of wicked men? And further, was there not a dire stress upon me to collect the amount of the dowry? For I am a man, poor after God's own heart, as the saying goes, and the poor must make trial of many things before they enter the palace of happiness, and then it is mostly through a postern gate. With these thoughts did I set out; and many men of the congregation remitted their toil in their several handicrafts to give me escort as far as Kavass-Novrod, where there was to await me, according to

concert, a driver with his conveyance to carry me across the frontier for a consideration. But when we came up, he made show of being very wroth, and looked very angry as to his eyes, saying that on my account he had delayed long over the given time, and that he would incur much blame and abuse from his master on his return. And upon that plea he made claim that the stipulated hire must be increased by fifty copecks. And what could I do, being in the hands of the Philistine, and oppressed by him? And thereupon we drove off, and the company followed three ells shouting after me the usual "May the Lord bless thee and preserve thee," repeating it seven times. Then, indeed, my heart became desolate, and I wept many tears; and for a distraction I took from my wallet "The Guide of the Ignorant," and read therein until it came on dark, and my eyes refused their service. Then I laid me down and slept throughout the night without a fear, for I had prayed my night prayer, and had dealt with the Tetragrammaton by Gematrya, so as to conjure Michael and Gabriel to stand by and encompass me with their wings. And towards dawn, when all the stars had returned to heaven for the morning prayers, the Bal-hagolah, the driver, to wit, awakened me by a thrust of his foot.

"Rouse thee," he cried, "and get thee into thy hiding-place; for we have passed the last milestone before the toll-house."

Now I must make known to thee, O wife of my bosom, that the wagon whereon I rode was freighted with skins of bullocks; and my plan was to conceal myself amongst these, and under cover thereof to cross

the frontier. For not being possessed of a passport, since I was lacking the money wherewith to procure such an one, necessity was upon me to pass over the border by stealth; and thus is a poor man rendered dishonest in the land of oppression. Now as to the bullock-skins, they were but freshly hided, so that they lay limp and huddled, and the smell was not the savor of spice and cinnamon. Into these, then, I coiled myself, and the driver heaped them about my feet and body that I might not be discovered. So we rode on, I direly struggling with my breath, until I heard a voice cry "Halt!" And then, indeed, my gizzard quaked mightily within me.

"What kind of manure dost thou cart there, Gregorov?" asked one of the sentries; for I could hear the clanking of their sabres.

"No manure," answered the driver; "untanned leather, that is all."

"And how much carcass inside?" spoke the sentry.

"By the head of my patron saint," said the driver, "no living thing could draw breath in there, unless it be a snoutless skunk."

"Or a Jew," added the sentry, and they all laughed inordinately.

So we were allowed to pass, and I crept from underneath my cover, and eagerly quaffed the air of heaven. And then the driver importuned me strongly to give him yet two more roubles for the danger he had run; or else he would turn back to the custom-house and deliver me up. But I prevailed upon him to wait till we reached an inn, for I was at that moment at my devotions, and might not engage in business of any

sort. And no sooner had we come to the inn, when I plied him with vodka, the cheap kind, at two copecks the measure; and he, being weary with night-vigil and drinking upon an empty stomach, became drowsy, and incontinently he slept. And thereupon I debated with myself as to the two roubles I had promised him. Not that I had intention to withhold them from him in requital for his greed, nor did I think of the kick which he had bestowed upon me; but there came into my mind the saying of our sages: "Whoso awakeneth a sleeper, draggeth a human soul out of heaven by the feet." So, not wishing to commit iniquity, and not knowing how long his drunken sleep might endure, being myself in haste, I waited not to hand him the money, but got me forth. And that is how I slipped under the hands of the frontier-watchmen; for God had stricken them with blindness.

And now I had come into the land of Ashkanaz, which is Edom on the hither side of Jordan, forasmuch as its people are evilly minded towards our race. And I made observation that their language is not unlike our own, being, in fact, an abortion thereof, and comparable to it in the degree of similitude between an ape and a man; and they speak it with much mincing of the mouth, even like girls when they are about to be kissed on the lips. But of that I have no knowledge, and speak only upon report and hearsay. So being now, as it were, in the wilderness, I followed closely upon the instructions which Moshke Kitsler, the glazier, had imparted unto me. For thou knowest the story how he went to this country of Britannia two years ago, having received a letter to come and claim

his brother's inheritance; and when he arrived, behold there had been no brother, and there was no inheritance, and the whole thing was the chicanery of some one who bore Moshke a grudge, suspicion pointing to Elya Schmendriak, who had gone to this town of London because Moshke had married the woman whom Elya had loved. And I have sought out Schmendriak, and questioned him straightly upon the matter; but he looked at me with brazen eyes and denied all knowledge of it. So then I went by the instruction which Moshke has bought at great cost and by much tribulation of soul.

And he had enjoined me to make my way first to Ostrovno; and since there was a market gathering at the place on the morrow, I had no trouble in finding accommodation with one of the wagoners, of whom there were many proceeding thither. And by reason of one of the horses falling lame, we arrived not there till nightfall. Thenceforward I was to journey by a certain wondrous contrivance whereof I have heard men speak, but such as is unknown to thee that hast no concern in the business of the world. And though I have become familiar with the thing, and have used it for my service on several occasions by this time, the first sight and aspect of it brought upon me a deep amazement. For standing there in the gloom, having first converted much shining silver into a worthless four-cornered scrap of paste-paper, I thought I beheld a monster with fiery eyes issuing from the bowels of the earth, and flying towards me on wings of smoke and flame, uttering hoarse screeches from outspread jaws. And in these jaws, wherefrom upleapt long

tongues of fire, I saw three men writhing like Chananya, Mishael, and Azariah, in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace; yet, like them, they were not consumed. And then the prodigy stood still, panting and snorting, and I repeated the blessing which is incumbent upon us at beholding an untoward spectacle; but though I looked narrowly, I saw nothing of the two score demons which Moshke swore were harnessed to the contrivance to set it in motion. And I could make no conjecture as to the mode of its propelling, but I stood and marvelled much at the cunning of the Gentile and his handiwork. And to me, thus distracted, there came a man, a dignitary of the town, it seemed, for there were strings of golden braid across his bosom and a silver cockade in his cap.

"Where are you bound for?" he accosted me.

"I am going to Hamburg, to sail by the ship, your Honor," I said.

"Then make haste and enter, else you will be left behind," he said surlily. And with that he tore open a panel in the flank of the monster, and flung me into the bulk and belly thereof; and its entrails were made of wood, fashioned into seats for men to sit upon. And for a little time I cowered there bewildered, for I felt the ground move under me, and the darkness without whirled past me in great flakes of blackness, and there was no resting-place for my eyes. But when I turned them upon the company that sat by my side or fronting me, I saw much laughter upon their faces, whereat I was greatly comforted, for men do not smile when the danger of death is upon them. And among them there was a young man with glasses as to his eyes, a great

scar as to his forehead, and a large pipe with long wooden stem and porcelain bowl as to his mouth. And he, having toised me for some time, addressed me as follows:

"What takes thee from out thy door-posts, Judas Yeshariat? Art thou going in search of the Lost Tribes?"

Thereon I made reply, swallowing my anger for that he had misnamed me strangely:

"My son, truly say our sages: 'He that openeth his mouth in ignorance, shall close it in confusion.' For it stands written that the Sons of Moses abide on the further side of the sand-river Sambatyon, and no man may cross it, for all the week it heaves with whirlwinds of stones and dust, and on the Sabbath, when it is at rest, it is not lawful to travel more than a thousand cubits; but the river measures a thousand and one."

And the company listened with open ears; but the young man aforesaid, not heeding my presence, as though I were a hay-stack or a piece of rock, turned to them, and said again:

"Is it not strange that these people cleave so perversely to their superstitions? And then there is much talk of progress and enlightenment in these days."

But then I could contain myself no longer, and burst into speech. "Young sir," I said, "it may be true that we are dark as to our beliefs, and that we do not see clearly the drift and purport of things; and that perchance may be because our eyes are blinded by tears for our nation's sorrows. But this much we know well amongst us, that it is enjoined to treat the stranger in

our gates with kindness and courtesy, and that it is becoming for mere striplings to pay reverence unto grey hairs. For what blessing is there in knowledge, if it be poisoned by malice of the heart?"

And then I ceased; but no one answered, and the young man busied himself strenuously in the rubbing of his spectacles. But I stood up and silently repeated the evening prayer, not forgetting the three backward paces at conclusion of the Eighteen Benedictions. And I slept soundly through the night; but in the morning, when I awoke, lo, a woe and a calamity had come upon me. For the ringlets at the side of my head, the glory of my temples and the badge of my piety, had been shorn away to the roots; and in my girdle was stuck a fragment of paper whereon were written these words, for I have had them expounded to me since: "Ahasuerus, thou hast convinced me of the error of my ways; therefore, mindful of what thou didst say, I have taken away with me thy grey hairs to reverence them at my leisure"; and the message was signed "Bierbauch, Student of the Theologies." And then I stood up, for I was left alone of all the company, and invoked upon him all the tribulations of Hiob, and all the imprecations which Balaam was not permitted to utter against the children of Israel, all these I flung forth against him; and I doubt not that by this time his hands have been stricken with palsy, and the sight has gone forth from his eyes. But as to my ringlets, even now they have not grown to their wonted length, and I fear me they will never again sprout with their ancient vigor, for I am an old man, and the marrow in my bones is dried up, and my sinews are brittle like stalks of straw.

But I will refrain from overmuch lamentation; for it may betide that this missive reaches thee on a Sabbath, and it would be a sin on my head to move thy heart to sorrow on such a day. Rather will I go on to narrate what things further befell me ere that I reached my appointed goal; and in all my doings I followed the admonishings of Moshke, the glazier.

So when I came to Hamburg, which was the place of my embarkation, I wended my steps straightway to the ship; and as I was setting foot on the gangway, some one tapped me on the shoulder, and said a quaint thing.

"Friend," he said, "thy Ten Commandments are dangling out behind thy back." And when I looked round, it appeared that the fringes of my Four-corner Garment were overlapping the nape of my neck. And I bestowed them in their proper place, laughing much at the folly and ignorance of the Gentile. Then I passed on into the hollow of the ship, and they showed me a place where I was to abide during the voyage; it was dark and squalid, fitted with narrow wooden chests along the wall that looked like coffins: and I spat out in deprecation of the thought. But I was sorely afraid, for, as thou knowest, this was my first adventure by sea. Presently I heard a loud booming sound, which might have been the bellowing of sea-monsters; and soon after the ship gathered itself up, and moved with a swinging motion from side to side. And first it swung not more violently than thou didst rock the cradle of our daughter Leah when she was yet a suckling; but soon it staggered, seemingly going two different ways at one time, until it overleapt its balance, and turned round and round upon itself, like a sleeper

who is tossed by evil dreams at night, so that its flooring stood uppermost. And then I sat down upon my wallet, for my bowels heaved, and my gall-bladder crept up into my throat. And I will give thee a token of the feeling that came over me. For dost thou remember how thou didst go with the other folks of the town to witness the hanging of the prisoners that were taken in the time of the rebellion; and how there was a spell upon thine eyes, so that thou couldst not turn them away from the sight till the hanging was finished, and the six of them swung dead and stark? And then thou didst fall to the ground in a swoon, and for three days no food passed thy lips, and for three days thou didst vomit and retch, till I thought thou wouldst cast forth thy very soul. Of such a sort were my own sufferings during those days; and when I was reviving, and began to feel I was still a living man, on the fourth night a storm arose that took the ship in its strong arms, and flung it against the vault of heaven, or thrust it into the caverns of the deep. And in my great fear I took my Pentateuch, and opened it, and upon its pages I sprinkled for a charm of the clean salt whereof I had taken with me a supply, so that I might not purchase of the Gentile, and I repeated psalms in multitude, and especially that which says: "They that go down in ships to the great waters, see the wonders of the Lord." For what death is there so horrible as to be devoured by the leviathans of the sea? And bitterly I regretted my improvidence in that I had not stocked myself with a sack of Sacred Earth that is dug from the soil of Palestine. For how else was I to find my way into the land of Canaan, if so it pleased God to put

an end to my days? But it seemed that on the Day of Atonement my name had not been blotted out from the Book of Life, so that I survived; for after a while the sea made its peace with God, and the lightnings were quenched, and the chariots of the thunder were again fastened to their staples. However, nothing further betided till we ran into harbor; but I vow upon my life and health, not less glad was I to leave the hollow of that ship than was Jonah, when the whalefish spat him forth, and he went to make prophecy unto the people of Nineveh.

Yet it concerned me somewhat to note that the day of my arrival was the second of the week, even the day whereon our sages say God created the Gehennom and Lilith and all the children of evil; and perchance it may be for that cause that my errand has not sped according to my desire. And having gone on land, I was even like unto the idols of the heathen, for I had eyes and saw not, and ears and heard not; and I was stricken as to the understanding of all things around me. But I chanced against a man of our own race and tongue, who proffered me his guidance unto the place of my destination. But he premised that it was necessary I should give him a piece of gold the equivalent of ten roubles, not for his own especial use and benefit, but because he affirmed it was the custom of strangers that arrived to bestow that sum upon the institutions for the tending of the sick and the study of the Sacred Writ. And I gave it, though with much secret doubtings of heart, and he conducted me faithfully. But upon inquiry I learned that there was no such custom, and that the man had deceived me. Now if he be in

good earnest a Student of the Law, I grudge him not the money; but if he be not, may it go towards the healing of dread sickness in his household.

So then I came to Leyb Tchariner, the aforesaid, the kinsman; and beneath his roof I tarried two days and two nights, until the stiffness had departed from out my limbs, and I was rested. Then he went out, and on my behalf he hired a place of abode; for he himself was greatly straitened as to room, dwelling as he did in three chambers with his wife and four sons and three daughters. And here I may note what thou wilt apprehend with wonder, even as I marvelled at the thing. For he has turned himself, for the earning of his bread, unto the making of shoes and other footgear, he that in his native country followed the calling of corn and wheat broker. But lest thou shouldst feel grieved thereat, be it known to thee herewith that in this country the constructing of shoes and garments is not deemed an indignity, as it is with us, but that the makers thereof are not considered inferior to the scribes of books or to the keepers of taverns; and many of them, and justly so, are advanced to posts of high honor in the community. And further I have here encountered sundry of my countrymen whom I never thought to set eyes upon before the resurrection of the dead; chiefly there was Chayim, the bellows-maker and tinker, who, as thou well knowest, disappeared from our township during the days that followed the conclusion of the Postanye, the revolution, to wit. And we all thought that he had been conveyed to Siberia, and had there died by reason of his sufferings. And the manner of his escape was as a miracle of God;

for he was just about to issue from his house, having it in his heart to flee the country because of the suspicion attaching to him, when, on the last step of his threshold, there suddenly came into his path two emissaries of police. And one of them asked: "Art thou Chayim Drontovar?" for they knew him not by person. And then God breathed cunning and wisdom into his head so that he made reply: "No, I am not he; but I left him this instant at his midday meal with his family, and he dwells on the third flooring." And then they detained him no longer, and he lay hidden all during the day in a heap of refuse, and at night he escaped, and came to this land. And his wife Mariam, even she who was flogged naked in the market-place to make her divulge her husband's secret resort, came at his bidding to this country, after she had recovered from the effect of the scourging; but she has now departed this life, and the day whereon I met Chayim was the second anniversary of her death. And of one other I shall give thee tidings, though he is not worthy that his name be mentioned by mouths that utter words of righteousness; I speak of Lutke, the glutton, as he was called. I doubt not thou rememberest him, a wild, dissolute fellow that had no shame in the sight of God or man; and a marvel it is that because of his deeds of evil and darkness the sun became not blotted out in the heavens. And finally, having filled full the measure of iniquity, and being in great straits for money, he went to the leader of the Attrat, the reconnoiterers that made search in the forests for the insurgents hidden there,—for this, too, happened in the time of the rebellion,—and offered upon payment to show a

place where was concealed great store of powder and shot and much accoutrement. And having received faithful promises of reward, he betrayed the spot, and according to his word was found much ammunition, which was carted away to Wratislavik, so that the insurgents were crippled of supplies, and could not carry on the war in that part of the country. And he, to escape their wrath,—for they would have flayed him alive,—went back with the Attrat, and sojourned among the soldiers; and thy sister's daughter has told me how she saw him go past her door unto the soldiers' mess and fill his bucket at the common caldron with the rest. And one day he vanished; but the manner of my encountering him I shall relate anon.

In this place I shall make utterance of certain things that have come within my observation, and have filled my heart with sorrow. For the people of our race dwelling in this country are for the most part of them by no means God-fearing. Rather do they offend greatly against the ordinances of our wise men. Thus it is that few of the women, though they be mothers of many children, wear the periwig that is the sign of matronhood; so that they walk abroad with outstretched necks and great luxuriance of hair-growth. And, again, the young men, and many of the elder, too, shave the hair of the face, and go about smooth like hounds that suffer with mange. Furthermore do they shamelessly carry rain-screens upon Sabbaths and festivals, though this is a city that has no fortifications, but lies open to the country upon all four sides. But more than this: they wear garments wherein wool and cotton are intermingled—a heinous sin, and one for which there is no

forgiveness. Yet this is not all; for I have heard of an abomination that is greater than the sum and aggregate of all the others. There is here a House of Prayer, rather should I call it a House of Blasphemy, where youths and maidens are gathered indiscriminately for the chanting of hymns on the Sabbath, and where a man makes music by breathing into long tubes of iron, and the destruction of our Sacred City is in no wise remembered amongst these people. And having been made aware of these things, straightway I eschewed also the drinking of milk, for in the eating of flesh I have not indulged since I left home. For in a land where such desecration is tolerated, no man is to be trusted for the purity and fitness of food. And ever since I have subsisted on the produce of the soil and of trees and upon the meat of fish roasted in oil, according to the manner and custom of the country.

And now touching the matter of the dowry. And upon this point I bear no grudge against him whom we have destined for our daughter's hand, though he has rated himself highly, even at the worth and value of five hundred roubles to be given for a marriage-portion. For he is a goodly youth, and master of a handicraft; nor shall it be with us as it is with many, to whom their son-in-law is as a yoke about the neck, since they must give him food and raiment and sustenance until he has learned to deal out his soup with his own ladle. And further—for must it not be said?—our daughter is not like other maidens, being stricken with a limp in her tongue, so that her words come haltingly, and stumble one against the other. And these things need the sheen of money to cast a glamour

over the eyes of suitors. For that she can repeat by heart three portions of Mishnah—what is it? It goes for nought in these ungodly days. And as for the tribulations that I have undergone, or that are in store for me on this matter, I make light of them; may they be taken for expiation of my transgressions, and may they turn aside untoward punishment. Besides, is it not right and fitting that in all joyous occasion there should be some tinge of bitterness to make us mindful that we are exiles, and abide in the midst of our adversaries?

First, then, I had recourse unto our townsmen that dwell in this city. And of them there is no inconsiderable number, nor, indeed, is there a region under the sun whereof one or two inhabitants are not congregated here—nay, not excepting Sheol and Tophet, for I have here seen stalking about devils blacker than ebony as to their skins and with many little horns of wool upon their heads; but their tails were not visible, for the law of the land permits them not to go unclothed. But the townsmen, though they wished me well and received me hospitably, are poor men with scarcely a sufficiency of bread, nor do they live like God in Frenchland, as the saying is. So of them I could expect nothing. Then, acting upon their advice, deeming it good, I went a different road. In this city there are men of our race whom God has blessed with riches passing the computation of man; they are said to eat from golden platters and to cast aside a garment after they have worn it but once. Now I thought it impossible that they would withhold from dispensing of their bounty unto me, a scholar and a poet from the crown of my head unto the toes of my feet. So

then I sat me down, and with much labor and application I indited epistles unto them, setting forth their greatness and telling them of my urgent necessity. And the manner of my writing was such as no man on earth has attempted before. For in honor of the first man I composed an acrostic showing the initial letters of his name backward and forward, and with the end letters I dealt likewise. And the second epistle I wrote in the Aramaic tongue, with interspersions of Chaldee; and yet in a third I contrived that every seventh word should contain the sum total of the man's name reckoned by Gematrya. And various other and quaint devices of word-play I designed. And my reason for this was such: that these men, coming together at their banquets or in the House of Learning, and falling upon me for a topic, might say unto one another: "Clearly he springs not from the people of the soil, and his mind lingers not among the commonplaces of thought, but ranges boldly through the wildernesses and untrodden paths of conception; he is a man whom we must reward and honor for the honoring of ourselves and the congregation." And in this expectation I waited; and having waited for the space of a week, I grew anxious and bewildered, for to all my missives there was no response. And I pondered many things, not knowing what to conjecture. Could it be that the messengers, whom they had entrusted with the bearing of their gift, had sequestered the money for their own use, defrauding me of my due and portion? But Leyb Tchariner inclined to this opinion: that my very wisdom had been my undoing, for that I had acted like a man who has dug a well of more than common

depth for the obtaining of more copious water; but that the travellers from whom I expected reward for my toil, being men of despatch and haste, nor having sufficient length of chain to their own pitchers and disdaining to use another's, had hurried on without a second glance. And perhaps it was as he said; and as time went on, and I heard nothing, I lost heart, and set my thoughts in another direction, for I perceived that my affairs were going the crab's walk, that is, rearward and not forward.

And thereupon I bethought myself to set up a school for the teaching of our sacred tongue and for the instruction of youths in their portion of Holy Writ. But it proved a sore burden unto me, for the boys were unruly and troublesome, and neither were they attentive in their tasks nor in the payment of the lesson-money. And it chanced, unfortunately, that most of them were the children of Littvaks, and spoke a dialect unlike my own, which is Polish; and thus they said "Sibboleth," and what should be "hee" was "hoo" in their mouths. For this reason I was a mockery unto them, and one day they all by concert brought certain engines, which they made to explode about my feet with sparks of fire and a loud reverberation. And upon that I fled from the chamber, nor have I returned amongst them to this day, for fear they might do me some bodily hurt. And in this extremity a plan entered into my head, hazardous in the accomplishing, but yet to be attempted. I have spoken before of Lutke, the same who turned informer; and it was in my heart to seek him, and reminding him of sundry benefits wherewith I had benefited him, and telling

him that more blessed is he who gives than he who receives, to make appeal to him on my claim of clanship. But when I told my project unto the townsmen, they laughed in derision: "What ails thee? Ask charity of Lutke? He will give—the calves which his oxen have borne him. Why, when we were building our synagogue and sent to him to make contribution towards the outlay, he said he would not deny us his help, but that he would give according to the deserts of the case. And on the following day there arrived a large casket, and our hearts were glad, for we thought: surely herein is some scroll of the Law, or some embroidered curtain to hang before the Ark; but when we opened it, lo and behold, it contained three mouldy bricks and a block of worm-eaten wood—curses on the blasphemer! Rather husband thy dignity, and go not near him, lest he should make thee to wallow in the gutter of his abuse."

All this they said to me, but I did not heed them, being of advice that he would give ear to me though he had flouted the others; and besides, it benefits not a poor man to be dainty in his enterprises.

So then I took a little boy for my guide, having ascertained the man's abode. For who knew it not? Had they not all gone to look at the mansion wherein he dwelt, and to marvel why in this world the sinner is ever preferred to the righteous? And as for his wealth, they say it was acquired by the sale of cast-off clothing, and in other mysterious ways. Then, having entrusted our bodies to the afore-mentioned contrivance that flies on the wings of fire and smoke, we were conveyed a long distance, and that—where shall the mar-

vels cease?—below the level of the ground; and the texture of sulphurous gloom and horror through which it rushed was ripped into a thousand fluttering shreds. And only at given intervals did it rise to the surface, so that our vitals might not swell to bursting with the noisome vapors. But at last we alighted, and came to Lutke's house, and I passed up the broad stairs of stone; and at my summons straightway the doors were opened by two sons of Anak, white-haired and abruptly-clad as to their nether garments. And they stopped and accosted me. But their words were to me as the babblings of popinjays, and I heeded them not, crying with the full girth of my voice: "Lutke! Lutke!" And at the sound he came forth, the man himself—for I knew him at once, by the indenting of the underlip where he had cleft it against the kerbstone in a drunken mood, and thou didst bandage it up with thine own hand. Then he looked at me, with an eye void of understanding, and said certain words to his hirelings. And then—as I live, I tell thee no falsehood—they gripped me by the shoulder, and jostled me, and thrusting me forth into the street, they shut the door with great violence. And so may the gate of Garden Eden be closed in his face—I will not curse him overmuch, for are not all Israel brothers? Then it bitterly repented me of my foolhardiness, in that I had defied sager counsel. I had eaten to the full of vexation of soul, and my eyes were downcast with shame; for the little boy had witnessed all, standing by the outer gate, and he would spread the tale—are not children's mouths like sieves, through which their tongues trickle uncontainedly? But more than all, upon that journey

I had expended one silver coin and two large pieces of copper, and my gain therefrom was not worth the tail of a rabid dog.

And on my return I kept steadfastly to my chamber, lest any one should feast his eyes on my humiliation. But on the third day a man, whose face I knew not, came to me, and spoke many words and privily. And the import thereof was that for several years there had not appeared in this city a "Good Hebrew," and that the inhabitants, at least those that belonged to our faith, were swayed by many doubts and misgivings, and that there was much confusion in their households and private affairs, and there was no one to give them counsel or explain away their anxieties; that I, being versed in Cabbalistic lore, and having penetrated deeply into the mysteries of heaven and earth, might fitly take such office upon me; and that there was much profit in the venture both for me and for him. Now the plan seemed good in my eyes, and we agreed. And he took upon himself the function of bedell and herald unto me, and caused it to go abroad that there had arrived a man of God, and all who were harassed by some trouble might come, and he would salve them. And straightway our door became besieged by questioners. And Tyveles, the bedell, stood in the outer chamber, and wrote the tablets, and took the fee; and such as brought none or not sufficient he drove away, and would not let them enter the inner chamber where I sat and delivered responses. And those that came were chiefly women—maidens, past their first youth, who would know if they were ever fated to stand beneath the marriage canopy; mothers of ill-conditioned

children, seeking a remedy for the curse; and lastly, matrons of long standing unto whom God had denied issue. To all these I replied according to the judgment which was in me. And this continued for several days; and in the night time of each day Tyveles would give me my share of the payments. But though I had suspicion that he gave not my due measure, I durst not say aught, for he was a man of fierce countenance and uncouth habits. At last, however, sinister rumors arose, and one day three men of accredited worth came and testified against Tyveles, how that he was an apostate, and had forsworn the faith, and had for long years consorted with the Gentiles; nor could Tyveles gainsay the accusers, for his falsehood lay manifest. So then the three men took hold of him, and jostled him from the chamber with blows and other ill-natured treatment. As for me, I took upon myself a fast of three days to expiate the pollution of contact with the man. But mark how the evil ever beget evil. For certain calumniators rose up against me, saying that I had had foreknowledge of the man's misdoings and yet had taken him to my bosom, and had broken bread with him. And the report gained credence, and thenceforth not a shadow darkened my threshold; even the townsmen looked askance and mistrusted me. Thus was I left to go my own way; and now the future lies dark before me, for I know not unto which thing to betake myself. And my only hope is, by abiding here until the Great and Holy Days, which is yet two gatherings of the moon, to be chosen by one of the congregations to recite the Law and hold solemn discourse for the cleansing of their sins, for which they will

make me remuneration and offer votive offerings on my behalf. And with this money I shall return to my country, and if it be not of the covenanted amount, verily our son-in-law that is to be must needs make an abatement thereon, if he have set his heart upon our daughter in good sooth.

So then let this suffice thee for an account of me, and fear not, for the Lord forsakes not those who keep His ordinances. And these few precepts would I have thee lay to heart in the ordering of our household. As for the flesh which is my perquisite from the congregation, let it go towards the sustaining of thy life, so that neither thou nor our daughter may suffer hunger in the interval. But as for the suet that goes with the portion, let it be melted and hawked about the town for sale, and all that accrues therefrom let it be laid by for the marriage. And if there be difficulty in the congealing of the fat, which might betide in this hot season, I would counsel thee to dig holes in the ground and therein to bestow it in covered pans; for it will meet with readier sale if it be hard and brittle. And the spot fittest for the bestowing methinks will be to the north side of our courtyard, where stands the great bay-tree that wards off the fierceness of the sun by its branches. And furthermore, in the feeding of our milch-goat, see that thou segregate the night-shade from the wholesome herbs, lest it die, as happened with the other; and goat-skin is a thing of small value, scarcely fetching the price of a fur collar against the winter. . . .

Glory be unto the Lord of Hosts! Knew I not that He would not withdraw His right hand from His

beloved? This very instant there has been given to me thy second epistle, which tells me glad tidings. A thousand roubles, sayest thou? Ay, ay! my heart leaps with joy, and my voice is raised in psalmody and thanksgiving. Surely it was God's own finger that turned the wheel of the lottery so that it stopped at the number of our ticket. So then I shall despatch my affairs in this city, which are not considerable, and do thou prepare for my home-coming. For I shall follow close upon the heels and haunches of this missive.

"WHOSE JUDGMENT IS JUSTICE"

While the heavens stand firm, to the world's last term
Shall be the three things that were from the start:
The Word of God, His chastening rod,
And the suffering-strength of a woman's heart.
Sayings of the Fathers (interpolated).

"AND thou weepest because thou hast lost a child that was not even yet a weanling? And therefore thou walkest here in solitude by the edge of the lake, wringing thy hands and crying aloud in the bitterness of thy heart? Ah, blessed are the young in their strength! Seest thou not how thou art blessed in being strong to wash the sorrow from thy soul through the flood-gates of the eyes? But in us that are old the sluices are weary with flowing, and, therefore, the grief remains unmoved, and lies heavy as a stone; and by reason of its endurance it becomes as part and parcel of our lives, so that we would not get rid of it, even if we could. Therefore I begrudge thee not thy tears; but lest thou shouldst arraign Heaven, and thereby bring sin upon thy head, I would have thee remember that whomsoever God loves He chastises. And me He has loved very much. Have I not lived to the age of sixty,—and I know not how much over,—and have I not been stricken very hard? One child thou didst lose, and one that had not learned to bite with its teeth? But I have lost four that were long past the pitfalls of infancy, and were like to grow up as cedars of Lebanon. But the great woodcutter,

which is the Angel of Death, cut them down, two of them singly and two of them at one stroke; for at that time he was in great haste, and worked busily with his hands. So while we sit here in the cool of the evening, let me tell thee the tale of my four children; but do thou, my daughter, on no account remit thy weeping.

"One son I had, and his name was Isaac—what am I saying?—nay, it was Benjamin, of whom I must tell thee first. He had grown to be thirteen, and already I was casting about my eyes among the maidens of the place to choose him a wife. Verily, he was a lad who might be a joy to his mother, and right willingly did he take upon himself the burdens of the household; for his father had gone betimes to prepare places for us all in Paradise. And this was the period of the Cantonists. What, thou knowest not of the Cantonists? Ah! I forgot that thou comest from afar, even from across the frontier, and the tale of them has not reached thy ears. Nor, indeed, is it fit for the ears of women, for it is a tale of darkness and misery and the rending of hearts. But for the purpose in hand it must needs be told thee at length and with a full mouth.

"It was in the time when Nicolai ruled over the land, and his councillors put an evil thought into his mind, like the thought of Pharaoh when he set his heart on the harassing of the children of Israel. And was there not sufficient of tribulation before? God knows all things, and whom He loves He chastises. And this, then, was the evil of the matter of the Cantonists. For the heads of the provinces and the

governors of the towns and the mayors of the villages looked with jealous eyes on our people, how their offspring waxed great by the blessing of God unto Abraham. And therefore they said craftily to one another:

"'Let us lay hands on the little children, which are the roots of a nation, growing into and strengthening the bulk of the trunk.'

"And then there was issued an edict which provided that youngsters ranging from the age of eight to fifteen, which is implied in the meaning of the word—since thou knowest not the language—should be taken from the homesteads of their birth and scattered about the country.

"Now this was the method of the taking. Over each village there was set a warden, and chiefly he was a man of our own faith, for he had most cognizance of the families of his brethren. And from this warden it was required that when called upon he should furnish boys from the children of the congregation to the number that was named. At first the people understood not this plague that had come upon them; but when presently one child was kidnapped, and then another, and the calamity spread abroad, then, indeed, there rose a wail of sorrow that might have shook the gates of heaven. But the heavens are planted upon firm foundation, and therefore they did not fall and crush the heads of the evil-doers. And mostly there suffered the poverty-stricken, for they could give no gifts to make propitious to them the hearts of those that held this matter in hand; and so when a rich man's son was named for a victim, his

father would go and prevail by bribery, so that there was a substitute. And surely there must be some great dispensing of God's favor upon this generation, that their eyes behold not what ours saw in those days. For our village lay full in the route of the children's journey; and they came in bodies of hundred, with the riders at their side and in their back, and the riders bore kantchouks in their hands that lay not idle. And through each rank there ran a leathern thong for a tether, fastened to the sleeve of each, lest at dark of night any should escape. For they marched day and night, huddled in their long mantles of raw hide that trailed over their feet, and made them to stumble; and whenever they slept, it was by the roadside or in the ditches, so that their garments were caked with muddy slime, unless the season was frosty and the ground stiff and unyielding. But from every hundred that went forth barely two or three returned; and that was because their hands and feet were bitten useless with the cold, and their hearing was numbed so that they heard not. As for the rest, this was the fate that befell them. They were penned up like cattle in stables, until creeping sores and diseases fastened upon them from want of food and storing room. Now those for whom there was hope of recovery, they were given to the peasants for the tending of their swine, and the yoke was laid upon them to draw furrows like oxen; and twelve of them went to one ox. But as for those that were rotten to the core and in whom the cancers had eaten the flesh to the bone, for these were built large wooden sheds, and an opiate was mixed in their food. And at night, when

they slept, there were lighted great trusses of wet straw, whereof the fumes penetrated the chinks, and during their sleep was their innocent life choked out of them.—What, thou dost not believe? See, I am near to the end of my days, and what would I gain by accusing my fellow-creatures idly? But these things happened as I have said, nor did I see a windmill where there was but a cow; rather have I been niggardly in my setting forth, for there are many to whom the memory of this still comes as a nightmare in the broad of the day. And each time when a troop had passed through, the parents would look at each other with leaden eyes, and turn their faces from their children; but in those days many a beard of brown whitened into snow over night. Such, then, is the story of the Cantonists, and I had a son Benjamin.

"Now, thus far I had escaped the visitation. And I knew not to what to ascribe my good fortune, unless it was because of my sister, who had now been a faithful servant for twelve years at the house of the Davoustchik, which is the Warden. And seemingly at her entreaty my son Benjamin had remained exempt. But the time came when for the greater part the available youngsters had been despatched, and there were left behind only the children of the wealthy, and the children of the Warden and of his kinsfolk, and the child that was mine, even my son Benjamin.

"And one night my sister came bringing me word that there was at last no thrusting off the impending doom, for that the kidnappers were ordered to seize my son Benjamin on the morrow. Yet, though the dismay was great in my heart, I did not fold my arms

idly, making no attempt to wrestle with fate. For of furtively slipping away there was no question, since the issues of the place were watched; but in my head there had been ripening a plan against the emergency. Therefore at dead of night I awoke my son,—for he slept soundly in ignorance of the danger,—and told him what there was to be done. And the boy looked up at me wildly, and said:

"'Mother dear, I am afraid.'

"And then I urged him again, saying that there was no other outlet from the disaster, and that all must be staked on this throw. Thus we sat during the night, and his arms clung about my neck, and there was a trembling through all his body. But towards the morning he grew calmer, and at last he said:

"'Mother dear, if this must be done, then I shall not resist, for I cannot bear to see thy grief; but I am afraid, afraid unto death.'

"And then in all haste I took a linen sheet from my couch, and placed two chairs for a trestle, and laying my son Benjamin thereon, I covered him with the sheet; and further, I lit two candles, and set them on the floor near his head. So then we waited; and after some time of waiting I heard the kidnappers outside, and rushing to the door I flung it open with a loud cry.

"'You have come too late—my son Benjamin died at the rising of the sun; look where I have laid him out for burial.'

"And one of the men—there were two—said according to the formula, 'Blessed is He whose judgment is justice.' And then he shouldered past me, for I dared

not prevent him, and strode up to the chairs, and lifted a corner of the sheet; and turning to the other he said, 'She speaks truth; we have come too late—he is dead.'

"Then he passed out, and on the threshold I caught his hand, and quickly pressed therein a silver coin, for that he had borne me out, and had saved my son Benjamin. And the man looked at me with big eyes and said nothing. And then I watched them passing down the street, giving praise to God for my deliverance, and thinking quickly that I should have an empty coffin taken from my house, and conceal my son Benjamin in his chamber till I might smuggle him away into safety. And at last, when the men were out of sight, I flew to the boy, and snatched off the covering and called him; but he slept on, worn out with the watching of the night. And then I shook him, and kissed him on the mouth—and at that his jaw fell, and I saw what I saw. And the coffin that went from my house was not empty. Aye, blessed be He whose judgment is justice. But what is this? I charged thee to weep, and yet thy tears come less plentiful for thy child that was not even a weanling.

"And now let me tell thee of my daughter Esther, who went by the name of Hadassah, the myrtle, because her breath was a fragrance, and the bloom lay on her face summer and winter; and her full tale of these was fifteen. And to all her lovers who asked her in marriage she gave one answer: 'I shall not go from under my mother's roof; for since my brother Benjamin died there is no one to bring grist to the mill, so that she and the two little ones'—meaning the

two youngest, who were twin—'may not go hungering.'

"Now the manner of our occupation was the growing of herbs and vegetables, which she went to sell in the houses of the town. But there was none that paid with more liberal hand than the Galach, I say the village priest, an old man and pious and walking in the fear of God. And about this time he died, and there was put in his place a young man, a wolf in sheep's clothing, who wrought evil things in secrecy. And the third time my daughter went to his house she returned with flaming cheeks:

"'Mother, the Galach has reminded me that I am a woman grown.' And thereafter it was I who carried him the produce of our field. And often he made inquiry after my daughter with feigned kindliness, though I knew it was with no good purpose; nor was there once that he passed my house without spying into the doorway. And one day he entered, asking me, 'Have you perchance seen a spaniel of mine that has gone astray?' And just then my daughter came in, and he said further:

"'Behold, I went out to seek a hound, and instead I have found a Rose of Sharon.'

"And thereon she answered rashly and without wisdom:

"'The thing that you find had liefer be a hound than a Rose of Sharon.'

"And he bit his lip, and, looking her full in the face, he said, 'So even the Roses of Sharon have thorns that sting? Yet none the less are they desirable for culling.' And so he continued to harp on the word in terms of insult.

"And that was not the only time, for after that he came often to the house, and I had not the courage to gainsay him entrance; and further, I besought Esther, if she could not hie from the chamber in time, to show him courtesy and meet cunning with cunning. But what could two women avail against him who wrought by the aid of Satan? And when my daughter disappeared, just as a stone is dropped into a well, even then he came and asked for her presence; and when I told him she was not, he laughed at me in my distraction, and said:

"'You have hidden her for fear of me, and that is unkind of you, for I am a man of God, and would do wrong unto no living thing.'

"And he said it so speciously that for long time I was swayed by doubt whether his ignorance was feigned or true, in the meantime making diligent inquiry in the neighborhood, and enjoining the fishers to give heed when they dragged the river for fish. And the time passed on without tidings.

"But after some weeks the priest came to me saying, 'You did right to bewail your daughter. I have this day come from Warsaw, and there I have seen the Rose of Sharon trailing in the mud of the gutters, beneath the light of the lanterns; and her name is a byword in every tavern for ten miles around.'

"And from that I knew that he lied, for at Warsaw, in the old cemetery, her father lies buried, and she would not dare to do evil in a place where his soul could lay its finger on her as she passed. And, moreover, I knew now that the priest had a hand in her vanishing.

"So I bided my time, and one day, having watched him depart on his conveyance, I went to his house, there to converse with the old woman who tended his kitchen, and I took with me a slice of honey-cake and a bottle of raisin wine in strong fermentation.

"'There, Katrinka,' I said, 'I have brought thee a gift that will please thee—the cake is soft and needs no teeth-grinding, and the wine will run like fire through thy body.' So then we sat talking, and I plied her cautiously with questions; and at last the wine loosed her tongue, and she spoke. 'Aye, aye,' she said, 'it is a dreary life and solitary I lead here since the old priest died, for my new master has much business abroad, and is no stay-at-home; but latterly he goes often to the convent of Tchenstochov, doing good service to a novice, and curing her of the devil that is strong within her.'

"And then I knew where I had to seek for my daughter; and having awaited the priest's return, and also having bestowed my two other children with an affinity of mine, I set out for the convent, two days' journey on foot, for perchance God would show me a way to wrest her from her adversaries. And on the way I stained my teeth with saffron and my hands and face with walnut, so that I might go unknown; and further, that I might have a pretext for not knowing their language, feigning to be a gipsy.

"Now, when I arrived, which was in the morning of the third day, I straightway hid among the bushes that hedged the courtyard of the convent. And not long after there came out two she-priests, leading between them a third that wore a thick veil of black

about her head so as to shut off all her sight. And as they led her up and down, I knew her for my daughter Esther by the upward jerk of her arms, which had been her habit as a child, and much I marvelled that the habit should have come back to her after such long time. But I took the encounter for an omen and a sign that she would soon be released from her captors. So each day I watched, but except for a sight of my child I gained nothing.

"At last came a time when she no longer appeared, and I waited in vain for her coming. But a week later, as I stood clawing at the fence in my distress, so that the blood sprang from the nails, a man came out on the terrace and stood looking about. And at last his eyes chanced on me, and he cried:

"'What dost thou there, thou vagabond? Come in and earn a meal honestly if thou wouldst, so that thou hast no need of pilfering.'

"And at the bidding I tremblingly passed in through the gate, not knowing what this might betoken. And then it appeared that one of the charwomen had fallen in a faint, and that I was to do her portion of the work. And from the talk of the others I learned that on the morrow there was to be a great solemnity, because of the dedication of a novice. And then I knew that the knife was at my throat, and that there was great need of a miracle.

"Now it chanced that I was stationed upon the second floor, and on my right hand there was a door whence I heard voices—one voice that spoke with loud eagerness, and a second whose words came faint and languid. And as I lay there on my hands and

knees listening with all the might of my ears, the door was opened, and out came the self-same priest I knew, red and angry, and in passing he darted at me with his foot, bidding me move out of his way. And when he was gone I gently lifted up the latch, and peered into the chamber; and there, stretched out all her length on the couch, lay my daughter Esther, or, at least, the shadow of her. And at sight of me she gasped, 'Mother, mother, come quickly, they have killed me!' for she knew me despite my disguise, and from that I augured that she was dying, for the dead know all things. And I flew to the couch, and cradling her head on my bosom, I bade her repeat the attestation of Israel: 'Hear, the Lord is our God!' And her lips moved faintly in struggling after the sound, but her hands kept ever jerking to her neck, as I had seen her do in the courtyard, but she had not strength to lift them high enough. And at last I understood, and, unfolding her dress, I saw upon her heart a crucifix of jasper; and snatching it up, I flung it upon the ground, so that it shivered into a thousand pieces. And at that she raised her head and said, 'Thanks, mother dear; I could not die with that on my——' And she breathed once more, and only once more. Then I kissed her and said, 'Blessed is He whose judgment is justice,' for that they had only killed her body, but not her soul.

"And at that moment there came in three of the she-priests, and they stood looking at me and my daughter and the fragments on the floor. But I had my tale ready: 'I heard a loud cry, and entering here, I found the maiden dying; and just before she died the

Mother of God there'—and I pointed to the large image in clay that was placed on a shelf over the couch—'stretched out her hand, took the crucifix from the maiden's bosom, and hurled it upon the floor. And all this I saw with my own eyes, and can testify to the miracle.'

"And they dared not deny my word, for that would be casting a doubt on the Mother of their God. And after I had got me forth from the convent, I rent my garment, and waited till the following day to see them bury my daughter; and in the night I came and tore down the cross that had been fixed over her grave, and planted around the place a circle of pebbles, so that she might lie apart from the Gentiles. After that I hurried away to my native place, there to sit through the ordained period of mourning.

"Thus did I lose my daughter—aye, blessed be He whose judgment is justice! But wherefore hast thou ceased to weep, thou that didst just now make such lamentation for thy child that had not outgrown its swathing-clothes?

"And now there remained to me but two, Isaac and David, who were born at one birth. And when I looked at them, I knew that my old age would not go tottering along without two strong staves to lean upon. But, alas! it was my doom to be a childless mother of children, and had I borne a hundred, I should only have been childless a hundredfold—but blessed be He whose judgment is justice! And the two were taken off in a manner that has no like within the memory of men—even by the hand of one another were they taken off, and died.

"Truly thou art a stranger in this land, yet hast thou heard of the great uprising wherewith the people of this country were uplifted against their oppressors, for the fame thereof has flooded the world, even as their blood flooded the soil of their fathers. But nowhere was the earth redder than there where flowed the blood of my twin sons, Isaac and David. For they heeded not the voice of their mother, but said, 'Counsel us not to our shame, so that it be said, Oh, this valiant progeny of the Maccabees! Look how these cocks crow each on his own dunghill! For we are mindful of our brother Benjamin, who died by the tyrant, and we have not forgotten our sister Esther, who died through the curse of his superstition; and for every hair of their head we shall slay one of his servants.' Thus they spoke, talking big words as is the wont of boys. And Isaac had lately married, and he said to his wife, 'Fear not; I shall return by the time I can look at the face of my child.'

"So they went forth with the rest, and fought the battles of their countrymen. And we women sat at home, and fought against their evil destiny with prayers and supplications; and our fighting, too, was not without its bloodshed. And suddenly we heard of the great battle that had been fought at Bialablotta, the place of the chalk mud, and that the Emperor's men had prevailed, and had driven their enemies—the brothers-in-arms of my sons—before them, and had slain them in multitudes. And a great band of the fugitives had fled within two miles of our village, and were encamped in the forest, where they would lie in wait for their pursuers.

"And the whole tenor of the calamity was related to us by one of the fugitives that escaped the slaughter; and I remember his words distinctly, for I drank them in, not with my ears, but with all the soul that is within me. And this is what he said: 'It was in the gathering of the darkness that we heard the trampling of hoofs from afar, and from the sound we knew that the Cossacks were coming. So we got ready, standing behind the trees on either side of the road, intending to close in upon them as they passed through and make havoc of them in our midst. But the Cossack is a child of the devil by a she-fox; and thus it was that they escaped destruction by the pricking of a horse-ear. For the stallions on which they rode became restive, tossing their heads and sniffing the air; and from that their riders knew that there were mares ahead, probably the mares of some transport. But as none of their comrades had passed in front, they guessed that some body of the enemy lay across their road. So, laughing at their own shrewdness, they dismounted, and waited till the dark had come on full. And then they picked out a hundred of their horses that were of least store, tied upon their backs a corpse, wherever they could find one,—and the search was easy,—and sent them galloping upon our trail. And we, hearing them advance, stood waiting with our weapons in our hands till the squadron had come up; and then we rushed forth, and started to hack at them with our knives, for we dared not shoot for fear of assistance coming to them. And how it was we knew not. There was no moon, and the trees towered high like great fingers pointing to heaven in accusation of

the horror; but, meeting no resistance, we fought and hacked and slaughtered, until suddenly we found other weapons darting at our bosoms, and we thought that the enemy had worked up his mettle. Then we returned the stabs with twofold vigor, and not a cry was uttered even by those in their death agony, for that was against the command. And we thought that now we were avenged; but just then came the first streak of dawn, and we saw what we had done, and how our madness had betrayed us into self-destruction, and there lay four hundred of us whom our own arms had sent into the last great sleep.'

"Thus much he told us, and the rest I learned for myself. For early in the morning, when we heard of the carnage, we went forth with fomentations and bandages to help the wounded, for we thought, 'Thus may other mothers go forth to ease our sons when they suffer.' And I was the foremost, and went amongst the bodies, turning them over and feeling their hearts; but most of them were still, for whose hand strikes more surely than that of a friend or familiar?

"And at last I came to where lay two bodies close to each other, with their left hands clasped tightly and their lips almost touching; and the dagger of the one stuck in the throat of the other, and the knife of the second gashed the bosom of the first. And at the sight a faintness came over me, and I crept up to them on my knees, averting my head with dire forebodings; and when I turned it—it was like twisting it from the foundations of my neck—and looked, why, behold—blessed be He whose judgment is justice!—

there were my two sons Isaac and David, or they that had been my sons, for now they belonged to the earth whereof their bodies were made. And with the strength of three I dragged them among the trees, and covered them with my headcloth; and then I ran to fetch Naomi, Isaac's wife, who was a mother of eleven days, and said to her, 'Quick! bring thy babe, so that it may look once upon the face of its father, for he will never look upon the face of his child—blessed be He whose judgment is justice!'

"And I took with me a hand-wagon, and laid thereon my two sons, and conveyed them to the 'Good Place,' lest they should be deposited with the others in the great hole that served for the common sepulchre.

"These things have I seen and done, and I have eaten to the full of child-sorrow, and they were none of them sucklings like thine. What is this? Dry-eyed? Truly it is said that a small grief melts away in the telling of a greater. And now let us go, since the night air is chill, and here comes my grandson to search for me; for the love he bears me is as great as half the love I have buried in the graves of my four children."

THE MORDECAI OF THE SERFS

By profession the two were "meshorrerim," which, idiomatically rendered, means "journeymen synagogue minstrels"; but for everyday purposes of life we may call them choristers. Of the two, Klotz sang bass, and Avshalom tenor. Apart from this difference, they were great friends; their hearts beat in concord, and they swerved not from each other in truth or in falsehood.

For the benefit of those who might wish to adopt the calling, I shall here set forth in more detail the scope and function of such a "chorister." First of all you must possess a voice to sing with—a good one of necessity, an excellent one by preference. Then you must gain admission into the troupe of one of the "chazanim," specifically "precentors," whose talents as such are too great to be supported by one single community, and who in consequence give devotional performances on tour. For instance, the proprietor of the choir to which Klotz and Avshalom belonged was Shaya Piper, whose headquarters were in Tamalov, which is in Lithuania, whence he made choral incursions into the country around. If you are a little boy, you must take especial care lest you should be kidnapped by a rival itinerant company; such things are not unknown, therefore lay my words to your soul. You must furthermore be endowed with a versatile digestion; for each day you will be quartered on a different household for your dinner, and the fare

ranges from roast goose to herring and potatoes, according to the means or the meanness of your hosts. If you have survived all this, you either become an operatic star in a West European Reform Temple, or you may marry the precentor's daughter, and inherit the prestige and practice of your father-in-law.

At present, however, no such dreams of glory filled the bosoms of Klotz and Avshalom. Their hearts were heavy within them, despite the fact that this was the season of the "Feast of Lots," the joyous commemoration of Israel's escape from the spite of Amalek, when Haman and his sons were hanged on a tree ten cubits high—eleven according to some authorities; one might as well be impartial in these matters of history.

"Who among them did this deed of malice unto us?" asked Klotz, with reference to the cause of their affliction. The two had been walking across country for the last two hours, and by their rate of walking it seemed they had a whole purgatory of devils to walk out of themselves.

"I don't know," gasped Avshalom, on whom the exertion was beginning to tell, for he was not half so sturdy as his comrade. "No one in particular, unless it be Klumpka, the plate-licker; but they all hate us—thee, because thou art good to look upon, and the maidens of the town make much of thee; and me, I know not, unless it be because thou hast taken me to thy bosom, after the manner of a brother, and so I share their hatred as I share thy love."

"The dogs!" growled Klotz. "All the plagues of Pharaoh into their vitals. I never did one of them evil wittingly, for I am not a man who burns down

his neighbor's house, and steals his property in the confusion; but on me they had no mercy, and would grow rich in my despoiling. Let us go back, Avshalom. We cannot run away from our calamity, unless we walked all the way to Gehennom."

And upon their homeward journey their minds harked back for the twentieth time to the terrible scene of the morning, which had turned the Sabbath for them into a day of sorrowing. And this is what had happened. It was towards the end of the service; the synagogue was filled with the sound of praying-shawls being folded up and with the opening and shutting of seat-boxes, when a hush went through the assembly, for the preceptor of preceptors, the shining light of religion, even Rabbi Gamaliel himself had risen from his seat, and had stood before the Sacred Ark, and had lifted up his voice:

"A woe and a sorrow which mine eyes have beholden will I relate unto you, my masters. It befell on the fifth day of the week, which was the Fast of Esther, that, upon a certain report which had reached me, I entered the dwelling-place of Shaya Piper, the precentor, at the hour when all his choristers were assembled, there to make inquiries into the state of their phylacteries and Four-corner garments. As to the Four-corner garments, I found that they were in fit condition, excepting that of Avshalom the tenor, whereof the fringes appending thereto were too short by half their ordained length, and that of Yashko Klotz the bass, which was none at all. And again what pertains to the phylacteries, all were in fit condition, excepting those of Avshalom the aforesaid,

whereof one of the headbands had been riven in twain, and those of Yashko Klotz, whereof the scroll of parchment had been removed from out of the leathern arm-capsule. And I bowed my head in affliction that this should be. But as to these two who have defiled the Name, I herewith decree, that during this Feast of Lots it shall not be lawful to ask them to join in the merrymaking, and that they shall go sequestered from all the congregation; and furthermore, it shall be forbidden to them to make the quest with their pyxes for the messenger-gifts which it is customary to bestow upon this season. Thus have I pronounced in my wisdom and judgment, and unto this let us say Amen."

The Amen was scarcely appropriate, but as Rabbi Gamaliel had a habit of never saying two words without clinching them with an "Unto this let us say," the congregation duly responded "Amen"; and Klotz and Avshalom, from sheer stupefaction or from force of habit, joined in the response. But the others knew not from what cause they responded, and said that not only were they heretics, but also impudent faces.

Now, however, the full force of his disgrace came home to Klotz, and his bile seethed like a caldron with the fire of his anger. That there had been a conspiracy he was sure. He knew that most of his fellow-choristers were but "righteousness clad in fur-skins," which translated means "wolves in sheep's clothing"; for none of them kept the appointed ordinances very strictly, and the fact that they had come without blot or blame from the ordeal of inspection was something more than accident. It was clear that some one had

laid information against him and Avshalom, and had warned all the others, so that they were prepared. And so this misfortune had come upon the two; and a misfortune it was, at least to Klotz, for the prohibition to quest meant a more serious loss to him than appeared on the surface. And now, as he thought of the gibes and mocking looks from which he had fled and to which he was returning, he tore at his hair, beat his bosom, and said, "Woe, woe is unto me!"

"Let be," said Avshalom; "it is not good to afflict thy soul more than need be over this matter. The rascals—a black year upon them! But the time will come for our triumph. Be patient."

"It will come, but it must be soon," said Klotz, vehemently. "I had counted on the money," he went on more gently, "to send to my poor mother. She is a widow, and old, and she will be sorely in want, for I have sent her nothing ever since the Good Days; and then it was no great matter."

"I have two roubles and a half," suggested Avshalom.

"Which thou hast saved up in copecks to buy a pair of boots therewith," broke in Klotz. "No, little brother,"—and he laid his hand caressingly on Avshalom's neck,—"I will not take from my heart to give unto my soul. But let me consider—my head is choking with thought. I care not for other things, only I cannot think of her as starving," and his strong voice shook a little.

So they trudged on without another word till the chimneys of Tamalov hove in sight. Klotz came to a sudden standstill.

"Answer me, Avshalom," he replied; "whom of the villagers around dost thou take to be the most stupid and ignorant? Thou knowest the country."

"That is an easy question," replied Avshalom, readily, "those of Tarnagov, without a doubt. Why, they are more stupid than those of Chelm in Bohemia. Dost thou not know the tale, how at a certain feast, whereat they all appeared in white trousers, they got so heavy with wine that they feared to rise from table, lest each should walk away on his neighbor's legs?"

"I have heard the tale," said Klotz, "but I do not believe it, it is merely a manner of speaking. Do they know Russian, dost thou think?"

"Russian!" echoed Avshalom, disdainfully. "Dost thou take them for scholars? They understand no language but their own; and we can talk that no worse than they, unless thou countest the grunting of their pigs and the bellowing of their bullocks at the plough for a language."

"King Solomon understood the language of many beasts, and he was a wise man," remarked Klotz.

"King Solomon understood because of his wisdom, and they understand because of their ignorance—that is the difference," answered Avshalom.

"Once more," said Klotz, "how far is it thither?"

"Two swift horses it will take less than three hours."

Avshalom wondered exceedingly at the drift of these questions; but Klotz did not choose to be explicit, and in that case it was no use pumping him.

"Let us walk more quickly," he said resolutely; "and hold thy head high. Let us not give the thieves

cause to mock us by slinking along like whipped curs. And, besides, I am hungry."

Avshalom said nothing, but wondered still more at the change of voice in Klotz and the look of determination—almost of exultation—that flashed from his eyes. What was in his mind?

The Sabbath was nearly over. On all sides the people were streaming to the House of Prayer, to hear the Book of Esther read and to execrate Haman's memory and make sport of him in effigy. At the second corner they saw Shaya Piper and his choristers coming on in a body. Klotz did not swerve an inch, but linked his arm in Avshalom's, and passed straight through their midst, nor did he turn his head at the gibes and laughter that broke from them in his rear.

"Let them laugh," he said quietly; "I think I shall prick a big hole in their laughter and make it ring hollow."

Avshalom looked puzzled.

"Are we not going to the synagogue?" he asked.

"No," said Klotz curtly, "they might ask us to sit on the mourners' seats; and, besides, I have work to do that will be best done while we are alone."

Avshalom was a little afraid. He did not like missing the service, although the choristers did not assist thereat; but in the hands of Klotz he was as clay beneath the potter's thumb.

By now they had reached their place of abode. It consisted of three rooms, one of which was consecrated to Shaya and his wife—they had no children; the second served as a kitchen; and the third was a

spacious hay-loft, where the choristers slept on trusses of straw or anything that could be misconstrued into a bed.

"Let us get something to eat first; my stomach is whining piteously," said Klotz.

But the "getting something" was more easily said than done. Shaya's wife was economical,—gossips called her miserly,—and kept everything well under lock and key. But at last they found half a Sabbath loaf and five onions. Klotz devoured his share in silence, thinking busily all the time.

"Ah," he sighed regretfully, after he had finished the last morsel, "glutton that I am, if I had not eaten so quickly, I should still be eating; but blessed be God that there is no more, for a full stomach makes an idle brain. Let me get to my task, for clearly Providence is with me."

It was quite dark now, and three stars had come out to convoy the departing Sabbath; but Klotz knew where the tallow stumps from the synagogue candelabra—one of Shaya's perquisites—were deposited. The way he set to work was peculiar. He went into the kitchen, and there took a saucer of shoe-blacking, which, by the infusion of water, he converted into a make-believe for ink; then he found a splinter of wood, which he sharpened into a stylus, and lastly helped himself to a huge sheet that served as fly-leaf to Shaya's Pentateuch. After that he sat down at the table and wrote. Avshalom looked over his shoulder in silent wonder; Klotz was covering the paper with the letters of the Russian alphabet in every possible combination—for what purpose Heaven only knew, for

Klotz was ignorant of the Russian tongue, and had never got further in the study of it than the shape of the letters. At last the two pages were filled, and weary work it had been, since it had worn away the stylus to half its original length and the patience of Klotz to its entire extent.

"There is just one thing more wanted," he said, looking with a satisfied smile at his handiwork.

He took one of the lighted stumps, went up to the hay-loft, and in two minutes came down again, carrying in his hand a waxen seal as large as a small plate.

"Where didst thou procure that?" queried Avshalom, awed by his friend's resourcefulness.

"I tore it from Klumpka's slaughter-certificate; thou knowest he holds an authorization to kill cattle—may he cut his own throat by mistake!" answered Klotz, unconcernedly; and with that he heated the wax, and glued it firmly on to the paper in the empty space he had left in the righthand corner at the top. Then he held the document at arm's length; it was, indeed, a stately and imposing affair.

"So far so good," he said, folding it up carefully and putting it into his pocket. "And now if thou art still willing to trust me with thy two roubles and a half till to-morrow—only till to-morrow," and he looked inquiringly at Avshalom.

The latter needed no further bidding, and Klotz took without a word of thanks the tanned goat-bladder that served alternately as purse and tobacco-pouch. These mutual accommodations were a matter of course.

"And now we must go to Chatzkel, the huckster,

and see if we can find there what we want," said Klotz.

This particular Chatzkel—for his name is legion—kept a sort of co-operative store, and boasted that in his shop one could purchase everything, from tin-tacks to atoned transgressions, as he quaintly put it. Otherwise he was not a bad sort of a fellow, and did many a little act of kindness in odd times and in odd places.

Klotz and Avshalom sallied out into the streets, and from every side there came upon their ears the sound of high revelry. Here and there they met with strange apparitions, boys and men in grotesque disguises—the masqueraders of the Jewish carnival. Avshalom's eyes followed them enviously into the houses, and he clenched his fist at the redoubled laughter that followed the maskers' entry. From all these joys he was an outcast. But Klotz made no sign that he heard and saw. Chatzkel was behind his counter as they entered.

"I cannot give you anything; it is forbidden by the Rabbi's edict," he greeted them.

"I have not come for a gift, but for a loan," said Klotz, quietly.

"I only lend on deposit," returned Chatzkel.

"That, too, I have foreseen—here is money;" and Klotz displayed the vast amount of wealth that was his on trust.

"H'm, it depends; what do you require?" asked Chatzkel.

"If you have them," said Klotz, as if he were asking for an ounce of pepper, "I want a general's uniform,

with cloak and medals; further, two false beards and a postilion's hat."

Chatzkel opened his eyes wide, and Avshalom nearly jumped out of his skin. He had thought they were going there to get a bottle of brandy and some honey-cake to make a little feast of their own. But all these absurdities—what were they for? Was Klotz mad?

"I know not what is the purpose of your disguise, nor how it will avail you," said Chatzkel, thoughtfully, after a while; "but if I have the things, you can take them and leave your money as a pledge."

So they followed him to his magazine, and he rummaged among the litter and the neatly-stacked bales, and behold!—did fortune favor them, or was Chatzkel really a great and wonderful man?—the articles were there. "What was there not?" as Chatzkel said, wiping his forehead, which shone with pride and perspiration. But he did not tell them why he was so good to them—that it was because he himself led a joyless, kinless life, and therefore could feel for them in their lonesome wretchedness.

"Stay with me this evening," he said, as he helped them to make up their packages.

"I thank you, but I cannot; I am tired, my limbs feel all broken," replied Klotz, "and besides, it is not lawful."

"Ah, I forgot," said Chatzkel, with a sigh, as he watched them out into the darkness. But he kept the money. "They will be glad of it afterwards," he thought to himself. "Who knows? They might have gamed it away, or spent it unworthily."

It was about ten o'clock when they reached home

again. "We must get to bed straight away," said Klotz, "for we must be up early in the morning."

Avshalom was nothing loth; he was very tired, so tired, in fact, that he could not take the trouble to ask why Klotz fetched the stable-key that lay under Shaya's pillow, and put it into his pocket; nor why Klotz placed the two straw-sacks on which they slept nearest to the door. Their bundles they had bestowed in the pent-house out in the courtyard, wherein Shaya's wife kept her geese for fattening from Tabernacles until the Festival of Lights.

The scent of the dawn was in the air when the others returned. They were none of them too steady about the legs, and as they stumbled up the staircase to the hay-loft, guffawing and chattering, Klotz and Avshalom started up from their sleep.

"Look at them," jeered Klumpka, holding the candle over them, "where they lie in their beauty, David and Jonathan. They are dreaming of the riches they will gather to-morrow," and the others laughed. But the two gave no sign that they heard, and Klotz smacked his lips, and threw back his head, as was his habit to do during sleep.

And presently Klumpka got tired of his jeering, and lay down. Klotz nudged Avshalom, and whispered, "Keep awake, for as soon as they are asleep we shall go forth." And in another half an hour they got up quietly and stole down. They had to pass through Shaya's room; he heard them, and sat up in bed.

"Who goes there?" he cried.

"It is I, Klotz, and Avshalom," was the answer in humble tones; "we are going to the Midrash-House, there to read in the Sacred Writ."

"There ye do well," yawned Shaya, "it will turn your minds to good, ye sinners in Israel, and may God pour grace and contrition into your hearts. No wonder evil dreams visit me at night; to think I have been sleeping all this time with two pair of desecrated phylacteries hanging over my bed," for that was the regular place for the articles in question, so that they might serve as security against their owner's decampment.

Klotz quickly led the way to the pent-house, took up the bundles, and then passed on into the silent street, down towards the shed that served for Shaya's stable; it stood half a mile beyond the town, but it was well protected, for the lock-chain was huge and massive, and the gates well fastened with clamps and rivets of iron. Avshalom followed drowsily, grumbling at his comrade's strange proceedings. Klotz quickly opened the gate and passed in.

"Don't stand there shivering, sleepy-head," he cried; "help me pull out the wagon and harness the horses—it will warm thee up."

In about ten minutes the conveyance stood ready. The wagon was large and roomy, the bottom littered with clean straw, with hurdles ribbing the length of both sides, and the two horses were strong and serviceable. Shaya used them to convey his company from place to place during his professional peregrinations.

Avshalom looked from the horses to Klotz, and at last asked the question that had been trembling on his lips.

"Thou art not going to sell them?"

"No, simpleton, I am not a thief," came the indignant reply; "we shall bring them back before it is time to groom and fodder them; and now for our disguise."

It did not take him long to don his uniform; it was big enough to go over his own clothes, and made him look stalwart and broad-shouldered; and the cloak hid the folds that hung loosely in the back. Avshalom put on his postilion's hat, and tucked his trousers into the shafts of his top-boots. And when they were ready, Klotz jumped up and seized the reins, and away they went over the hard frozen ground; it was towards the end of February, and the cold held the world with an iron grasp.

"Now wilt thou tell me what hare-brained idea thou art harboring?" asked Avshalom, getting seriously alarmed as to the outcome of their venture.

They had gone a good way already, and Klotz had talked about this and that and nothing at all.

"Willingly," he answered, "for we must concert our plans so that there may not be a hitch."

And then he told what it was in his heart to do; and as Avshalom listened, his limbs began to shake, and he would have turned white, if the cold had not already turned him blue.

"Thou madman," he said, through his chattering teeth; "we shall be discovered, and they will tear us to pieces."

"Thou art very stupid," remarked Klotz, indifferently; "have we not been through worse things before? Hast thou forgotten how we escaped the recruiters at Ulsk?"

And then he gradually managed to talk a little courage into his faint-hearted ally; and what his persuasion failed to do was effected by a certain bottle of good size and better contents: Klotz had found it in the tail pocket of his uniform, for Chatzkel had thought that smuggling a gift did not come within the rabbinical edict. And so they went on, past the turf-stacks of Bavarak, past the flour-mills of Diabritz, past the cattle-pens of Vorshk. And between the admonitions of Klotz and the ministrations of the bottle, Avshalom beguiled the time in mumbling benedictory psalms on their enterprise. At last they caught sight of the birch-forest, the outposts of which skirted the houses of Tarnagov, their destination. Klotz now put the reins into Avshalom's hands, and told him to drive at break-neck speed. So they rattled with tremendous clatter through the high-street, while every window flew open, and craning necks and gaping mouths protruded in multitudes. They pulled up at the tavern, and at the sound two ostlers rushed out. Avshalom jumped down, and stood holding the horses' heads.

"Help his Excellency to alight," he whispered to the two men. "Our state-carriage broke a wheel, and we had to come on in a ladder-cart. My master bears important despatches from St. Petersburg."

But Klotz grandiosely waved aside their assistance, as though he did not like them to lay hands on him, and got out with much ceremony and circumstance.

"What, is there no one here to receive a messenger of the Government?" he roared, pulling himself up to his full height, which exceeded that of an ordinary

man. And without further ado he strode towards the house, closely followed by Avshalom.

On the threshold they were met by the host, hot and breathless. "Pardon, your Honor," he said, "I was kennelling my bloodhounds—they are very fierce to-day, and the horses——"

Klotz stopped him with a wave of the hand. "I cannot have long speeches, for I am in haste," he said. "Let the town-crier go out and bid all the heads of families assemble here within the hour, and let those that cannot come send their proxies. I bear an imperial rescript."

"Your will shall be done," said the host, bowing low, for he was struck with awe at the stranger's voice and demeanor.

Klotz sat down by the chimney fire in solitary grandeur, while Avshalom stood whispering with the host, and told him what Klotz had enjoined him to say. And sure enough, in a little time the tavern began to fill with peasants, for this was Sunday, and Klotz had taken that into account; and they all stood in the farthest corner, casting anxious, sidelong glances at him, while Avshalom went amongst them, and spread the tale of his master's greatness. More and more peasants came, and a hum of eager excitement surged through the crowd. What was going to happen? What were they going to hear? Was there some new oppression, some new disability to be laid on them in addition to those beneath which the poor serfs already groaned? And each man looked anxiously at his neighbor.

At last the host came forward on tiptoe and whispered, "My lord, we are assembled."

Then Klotz got up leisurely, threw back his cloak, so that all could see the glitter of his sham stars and crosses, and stood eying them disdainfully; slowly and deliberately he unfolded his document, lifted his cap, and reverently kissed the great seal.

"In the name of the Czar," he began, and that glorious deep voice of his seemed to travel into the caverns of the earth, and thence to reverberate with redoubled volumes of sound; and a tremor quivered through the assembly. "Whereas we have decreed, in our great mercy and in our all-pitiful goodness of heart to seek the welfare of the peoples under our dominion: it shall be established henceforth as a law and a statute unto all ages that servitude shall cease amongst our subjects, and that every man shall be master of his body and his chattels and all that appertaineth unto him; and that it shall not be lawful for any Lord of Manor to claim tithe and tribute of him, and the strength of his sinews shall no more be expended in tilling the feudal lands, but he shall be permitted to husband his own, and to reap the labor of his hands in his own garner and his own threshing-floor. And this shall obtain throughout the length and breadth of our rule. And herewith we send messengers to proclaim the good tidings unto all such whom it shall benefit, even in the tongue that is severally understanded of them; and we have set upon it the warranty of our Great Seal. Furthermore we make known that whosoever shall suffer violence or encroachment upon these rights, unto him it shall be given to vindicate them with might and main, even to the wielding of arms. And in token of this we

authorize our messengers to enact a liberation-tax of one-half silver rouble per head of family, to augment the exchequer of the empire. Long live the Czar."

Such were the terms of the proclamation; and for some time after the reading the heavy hand of surprise lay on the mouths of the listeners and kept them mute; then there came little ebullitions of sound that were like the wind that rasps through the trees, and tells that the thunder is coming. But it did not suit Klotz that their feelings should find vent; it was best that their thoughts should remain cumbered down by their unuttered amazement. So in business-like tone he continued:

"Silence, all: quick, host, get me pen and paper—for my portfolio was left in my carriage—so that I may write down the names of all who seek enfranchisement; for these are to be registered in the archives of the land to be a charter to them and their children and their progeny afterwards; and forget not the tax."

Then there began a crush and commotion to get to the table where Klotz was seated, each one striving to be the first enrolled on the list of the emancipated; and those who had no money on the spot, either borrowed it from their friends or from the tavern-keeper on security of rings and snuff-boxes and such like. For it had come at last, the blessed hour of freedom, for which they had pined and whined; now they would know what life meant; now they could drink one-half the time, and idle half the other, whilst their wives saw to the potato crop and tended the pigs —it was glorious. And the tax—it was that which proved the genuineness of the rescript. Was there ever a rescript issued for good or ill whereto there did

not hang an impost? So Klotz wrote down the name and trade of each man in his turn, and Avshalom raked in the money; his fingers trembled a little, no doubt on account of the cold. At last it was all over, and Klotz got up, stretched himself mightily, and said, 'Brothers,—for we are that now, brothers and peers,—I must hasten on to carry the good news further; and when my carriage comes here, tell my servants to seek me on the road to Minsk. Let us go," turning to Avshalom. "Health and great riches upon you all."

With that they passed out, and everybody stood out of their way with deep obeisances, and one or two made even bold enough to print a kiss on the corner of the mock messenger's cloak.

"Drive hard, for the love of Heaven," whispered Klotz; for now that his object was accomplished, he felt his heart falling between his feet, and his blood was congealed into clots with fear. But as he put his foot on the axle, a loud shout was heard, and a man came running towards them frantically. Klotz and Avshalom turned pale, and looked at each other.

"For mercy's sake," panted the man, when he came near, "do not go before you have added my name. I was belated, and my brother came to seek me, lest I and my household should remain in servitude when all the others went free."

Klotz waited a moment, till his own breath went steady again. "What is thy name?" he asked severely.

"Ivanov Shleutra, and I am the carrion-carter of this place, your Honor."

"Ivanov," continued Klotz, "thou shalt go free

like the rest, but for thy remissness the penalty shall be one whole rouble over and above the half."

And that was a rouble on which they had not reckoned; but they thought that it was more hardly earned than all the rest put together. And the whole amount, as they counted it, came to seventy-three roubles and a half, not to mention the four coins that were spurious. But they did not laugh till they were again well on the road to Tamalov; they had doffed their disguises long ago, and when finally they had restored the horses and vehicle to their proper abode, then only was it that they felt the rock of anxiety lifted from off their bosoms.

They had met nobody, for it was the hour of the midday meal, and no one stirred abroad, lest he should be cheated out of his portion of the three-cornered meat-dumplings that were the specialty of the day. So they walked on to Shaya's house, while Avshalom now and then peeped sideways at his companion, like a mortal who had long sojourned with a god and known it not.

When they came in, dinner was finished, and all the choristers were there, for Shaya had behaved handsomely, and had feasted them at home that day; and now they sat, each for himself, taking stock of the money which that morning's questing had brought him. The harvest had been but scanty. Some had taken no more than two roubles; but Klumpka had managed to obtain three roubles twenty copecks and a big bruise on the right side of his forehead. How he came by that was not known; later on it was current that he had climbed to the garret of a poor bedridden cripple,

whence he would not depart till the indignant neighbors pitched him down-stairs. Klumpka denied the report, but then, why was he called the "plate-licker?"

"Here come the Korahs, the wealthy men," he jeered, as he caught sight of Klotz and Avshalom. "Where have ye quested? In the House of Everlasting Life—among the tombstones?"

"Yes," said Klotz, "the dead are generous, they have given me richly; listen," and he jingled the silver in his pocket. "Why, I can even afford to give thee five copecks to buy a plaster for thy bruise," and he threw the coin at his feet.

"Thou hast stolen it," screamed Klumpka.

"Then wait till the robbed comes and makes complaint," answered Klotz, and busied himself among the scraps and bones that remained from the meal; he was content, for he knew that his mother would have better fare for many a day to come.

Now, in this adventure of Klotz there were several things that gave cause for wonder. First of all the choristers wondered what danger it was that Avshalom had escaped so that he offered public thanksgiving for his deliverance, and paid a rouble in token of his sincerity; and further, where he had obtained the rouble. Then Abihu, Shaya's groom, wondered why, when he came to tend the horses, he found them so broken-winded. Furthermore, Klumpka wondered who it was that had torn the seal from his slaughter-certificate. Again, the whole province wondered what spirit of madness had come over the peaceful peasantry of Tarnagov that they should refuse their serf-labor when called upon to do so by the overseers and task-

masters, so that the police had to come with staves and blunt bayonets to force them to their toil, and stop their babbling about rescripts and emissaries and liberty charters. And finally Klotz and Avshalom wondered what manner of Providence it could be that turned the evil that man designed against man into a source of blessing and augmentation.

THE AMBUSH OF CONSCIENCE

I

A HARD, sullen November sky. There were no clouds, only an expanse of untinted murkiness massed thickly, impenetrably. Hour after hour the impetuous north-wind, resenting its lifeless monotony, had led his boisterous battalions against it to make it wince, until he had screamed himself hoarse with anger. But the black mass overhead lay there unmoved in leaden apathy. Now and then a few drops trickled out of it. Perhaps it was weeping tears of humiliation that it had not been deemed worthy of a soul to feel with.

The steppe underneath was not so badly off. At least it had been given a voice. It spoke in the whimperings of the disconsolate little grass-blades, in the whining of the shrivelled underbrush. Here and there, too, it had opened into rifts and fissures, like the parting of lips; but these were not for speech. With them the hard-driven glebe drew its breath; for the pores, which served that purpose when the year was more propitious, had shrunk and closed up with the vice-like cold. But between sky and earth there hovered, as it were, a spirit of kinship, born of the likeness that stands out more strongly between things unsightly than between things beautiful. Now, if ever, they could not mistake that they were both the fashioning of the same hand, and so took hope again by

virtue of that conviction. Each was glad that it was not solitary in its discomfiture.

As though to reconcile them still more to their elemental misery, there came a pageant of human woe, a pomp of squalor and rags and wretchedness. On and on it passed in sore-footed, way-worn weariness—a caravan of shadows which seemed to have strayed from their former selves, and were now voyaging through the world to find them. But no, these were not phantoms. They spoke and groaned and ached; and pain—as the dead clouds knew—is the test of life. They felt their life keenly enough, these men, women, and children; a good many of them had long come to the opinion that they would not feel their death-pangs so acutely. But they had no choice. There was just one thing to do—to go on and onward towards their destination, if it pleased God they should ever reach it. The wayfarers comprised fifty Jewish families, uprooted by a sudden ordinance from their homesteads in the Interior, and now in transit to the far-off Pale of Settlement.

And so they had been fighting the distance that lay between as one fights an enemy. Every verst they covered was a victory, every mile a triumph. But these conquests had left their mark on them without and within. They were evidenced in the sallow faces, the huddled frames, the sinewless limbs. Yet they had wrought their more ghastly work inwardly. They had left the pilgrims' heart beating, but that was all. Each one felt its own throes, but not its neighbor's. For there is nothing more terrible than the selfishness of the wretched, whose motto has become: Every

one for himself, and God for us all. So the palsied groups struggled on, each man shepherding his own flock, and answering his fellow's cry of distress by mockingly pointing to his own despair.

Gregor Malakof stood at one of the many windows of his farm-house, watching the dismal company defiling past. On his left hand a huge wolf-hound had upreared himself, front paws on the ledge, and growling angrily at the strange apparitions. His tongue lolled out all its length, because his master held him so tightly in leash. To Gregor's right was Marfa, his widowed mother. An evil smile played about her withered lips.

"Suppose you let Kalash loose for a minute or two," she said, as the hound uttered a fiercer snarl. And when her son remained silent, she went on: "What a stampede there would be among the scarecrows. Do, there's a good boy. It is so dull on the farm, I haven't laughed for a long time."

The young man shrugged his shoulders. "Your eyes are playing you false," he replied; "these are not wolves."

"No, not wolves, but worse," she said, throwing him a covert glance of vexation. "Curses on the Christ-slayers. How my heart leaps with pleasure at the sight; now they feel as Christ felt carrying the cross to Calvary. Virgin Mother, look on your revenge."

"If you ask her to look, you ask her to weep," said Gregor, biting his lip.

"Yes, with joy at their misery. I know better; she has taken her woman's heart with her into Heaven, and she remembers the crown of thorns. Thorns into

their eyes, thorns into their feet, so that they go blind and lame. Look, Gregor, how that man there is beating his little boy. Strike harder, Judas, kill your brood before it can breed more Judases."

"Mother, you talk like a child," said Gregor, impatiently.

With a quick gesture she placed her arm round his neck.

"Little Gregor, you are not cross with me?" she fawned. "When you frown, darkness comes over my eyes. How I love you, my only one, my sole and single joy."

"And, therefore, you need not vent all your hatred on these unfortunate wretches," he said more gently.

"Not if it displeases you. See, they have all passed by. Tell me, are they not accursed, when the mere sight of them has nearly caused strife between mother and son?"

"Let us forget them," was the quiet answer; "there are pleasanter things one may remember than nightmares stalking about in broad daylight."

He bent forward and peered ahead. Was it to disengage himself from the embrace?

"What are you looking at?" asked Marfa, craning her neck.

"Two women. The younger is carrying the older on her back. They are stragglers from the main body."

Marfa's face resumed its evil smile. "Yes, I am just beginning to see them. They will never catch the others up. Ugh! I should not like to cross the marsh-valley with a carcass on my shoulders."

Gregor made no answer, but watched keenly. Now the older woman had alighted on the ground, and came tottering on, supported round the waist by her companion's arm. Step by step they picked their way till they were abreast of the window, and then with a lurch and a thud the woman measured her length in the roadway. A wail of agony broke from the girl as she bent down to raise her. Painfully she got her into a sitting posture, and thence endeavored to hoist her up again on to her strong young back. But the inert limbs could not grip. Time after time the girl made the attempt, until, convinced of its futility, she threw herself on her knees, and broke into a fit of sobbing.

With a smothered oath Gregor turned towards the door.

"Don't go out to help them," Marfa screamed after him; "it's all a comedy, they want us to pity them and give them money."

The slam of the door answered her. Quickly Gregor secured Kalash in his kennel, because his presence would not be advisable on the scene of action. And as Gregor came up close, a glance told him that this was not a matter of comedy, or at least one in which Death was hovering in the side-wings, impatiently waiting his call.

The girl looked up on hearing the approaching footsteps, with a flicker of hope in her eyes. Perhaps a little bit of God's mercy had lost its way into these desolate regions.

"You see what we are," she said, advancing and talking to him in his own tongue; "this is my mother, and we are Jewesses. But remember that without us

you would not have been a Christian. You owe us payment for that. Give us shelter for one night, among your cattle—it does not matter. If not, kill us quickly, and we shall bless you with our last breath."

He looked at her hard, but not with the sort of look that should bring the blood to an honest woman's cheek. Then silently, or rather with a short gesture of assent, he stepped past her to where her mother was watching him with eyes of piteous anxiety. In a moment he had gathered her up in his arms, gently and skilfully, as only men of giant strength can do these things.

"Follow me," he said to the girl.

So they came to the little avenue of elms leading up to the house. Gregor entered the long, stone-floored corridor, and pushed open the second door on the left. They stood in a neat, comfortable chamber, snug and homely despite its furniture of planed wood. In a corner was a pallet with pillows and covering of eider-down. The sick woman eyed it hungrily. If he would only lay her there! And as Gregor deposited her upon it, she feebly caught both his hands, and had covered them with kisses before he could snatch them away.

"See to her," he said to the girl, who was looking on dazed; "I shall be back presently."

As he came out into the passage, he caught sight of Marfa's head peeping out from the doorway opposite. He took no notice of her, but locked the chamber containing his strange visitors, put the key into his pocket, and walked on to the hay-loft at the back of the house. He climbed the ladder, and in a minute

or two was down again with a truss of straw on his shoulder.

At the bottom Marfa was waiting for him, her face distorted with anger.

"You surely are not going to lodge the infidels in the house?" she asked with fictitious calm.

"Yes, why not? The woman will not live till to-morrow."

"But if you are in your right mind, you will not expect me to pass the night under one roof with them?"

"There is no compulsion, mother; you will easily find accommodation with one of the tenants in the village."

Marfa's eyes shot sparks of fire. "Listen, all the world," she almost screamed; "the son is turning his mother out of house and home for the sake of two vagabond hussies!"

"The son is bidding his mother follow her own pleasure," echoed Gregor; "can a son be more dutiful?"

"Have you no pride of your own?" she went on venomously. "The descendant of two score landed gentlemen is making a pack-ass of himself, as if he had not a single farm-hand on his estate. And for whom? I can hear your father gnashing his teeth in heaven."

"You have good ears," said Gregor, drily. "As for the men, they have their own work, and quite enough of that. This charge I have made mine entirely, unless you care to help me."

Before she had time to frame a reply, he had fixed

his load more securely, and was striding off. Softly he let himself into the chamber, and slipped the truss on the floor.

"This is all I can do for you by way of a couch," he said to the girl, who was chafing her mother's hands; "in that cupboard, though, you will find a bear-rug to keep you warm in the night. And now you will want food."

He locked the room as before, walked into the kitchen, and, unconcerned at the curious glances of the maid-servants, possessed himself of a wheat-loaf and a jug of milk. When he came back, the woman had fallen into a heavy slumber, and her breath came short and irregular. He scarcely had need to look at the ashen pallor of her face to know what that betokened. The girl sat by her side, seemingly unconscious of all save that her mother slept.

"Eat," he said, setting the victuals before her.

"I must wait till mother can eat as well," she replied.

He checked the impulse to utter what was on his tongue, and instead urged her again. This time she acquiesced. He watched her in silence. He noted she was younger than she had appeared at first sight. The tense misery of her face had relaxed, and now it showed pure oval, with all the sharp edge-lines softened into curves. The dull film had drawn off from her eyes, so that they shone like a mirror cleansed of its cobwebs. Her hair, too, had taken to itself a sabler tint, and framed her temples with a flashing darkness. He had guessed at the potentialities of that face as he first saw it glorify the drab and dreary roadside into

something like a garden-walk; but he had not expected that it would consummate itself so quickly, and leave no further margin for perfection. And now he knew why that feeling of awe was upon him. Nature was boundless, infinite, and he had been privileged to look upon one of her limits.

Meantime she was eating, at first mechanically, as though only in deference to his bidding; but soon her hunger asserted its claims, and insisted on being gratified on its own merits. Suddenly she recollected an omission.

"I have not thanked you," she said.

"What for? You asked me to cancel a debt, and I have done so."

"The whole world repudiates it," she remarked bitterly, "and you——"

"And I am redeeming it from the charge of ingratitude," he broke in; she knew not whether in jest or earnest. "You seem to have had sad experiences; you must have suffered much," he went on.

"More than the others; I have suffered for two," she said with a glance at the form on the pallet. "She has not slept in a bed for sixteen days."

"Why have you come by this route? Why did you not go by rail?"

"Because we did not have enough money for the fare. We were driven out at three days' notice, and that did not leave us time to sell our homes. Besides, who would buy when he knew that, after very little waiting, he would be able to go and lay his hands on whatever pleased his eyes? No one is so unthrifty. And so we packed together what we could carry in

clothes and more valuable belongings, and went out with God in our hearts, and little money in our pockets. But what we had, served us for food and shelter —of a kind—up to the present; and now I understand we are only two days' journey from our destination. However, we have set four graves for sign-posts to show the road we came."

Gregor was thinking there would probably be a fifth soon, but he kept that to himself.

"I am glad I happened to be at home," he said, "I had business elsewhere, but I sent somebody instead."

The girl did not echo him. She found nothing strange in the lucky chance; did she not say they had gone out with God in their hearts? And if she did not give as much thought to her host's kindness as it deserved, it was for the same reason. One is not beholden to the tool, but to the artificer.

However, she was quickly reminded of her default. The woman on the couch stirred, and stretched out her hand as though groping through darkness.

"Rachel," she said.

The girl leapt up; her mother's voice had become strangely husky, and it was only with difficulty that she caught the words that followed:—

"If the Gentile comes, tell him I have left him my blessing. I should have been ashamed to enter Paradise, had I died in the open air like a beast of the field."

"Why, what are you saying?" queried Rachel, in painful wonder. "The Gentile is here—don't you see him?"

"What a pity we cannot take this copper caldron away with us," went on the husky voice; "it belonged to my mother before me, and would have been yours—an honest, clean caldron, and now the gendarme's wife will boil pig's flesh in it. But it was too heavy. Yes, tell the Gentile I have blessed him."

Rachel turned round despairingly, but Gregor had gone out. Five minutes afterwards was heard the sound of horse-hoofs galloping, and presently he came back.

"I have sent for a doctor," he said quietly; "if only he comes soon enough."

But he knew well that, however soon the doctor came, it would still be too late. And so it was. About midnight Kalash broke out into furious barking, which gradually thinned off into an abject whine. It is said that four-footed things, not having an immortal soul, are condemned to see that which is mercifully concealed from human eyes. For that was the time when the Shadow of Death entered at the gate on his errand to the woman upon the pallet.

II

Gregor saw to the burial arrangements—it could hardly be called a funeral. By the following afternoon the plain deal-box was in readiness, and two sturdy farm-hands carried it to the grave which had been dug outside the fence that encompassed the estate on the north side. Rachel followed, and at a little distance Gregor brought up the rear. At first he had thought of doing the sexton work all by himself, but

in the end he changed his mind. He did not want her to recollect him as the man who buried her mother. The grief-stricken are not always over-generous in their impressions. And her grief was of the selfish sort, showing no tear and making no clamor, as though it had frozen in her heart.

And so she watched the men silently at their work, and when the grave had grown into a hillock, she turned quietly away. In a moment Gregor was beside her.

"If you like, I shall harness four horses, and in a few hours you will catch up with your people," he said.

She paused a moment in thought, and then forced the words to her lips:

"You already have many servants, but perhaps you can make use of one more. Set me your humblest task, make me your meanest drudge, I shall be content; only let me sit each day for a little time by my mother's grave."

He looked astonished, incredulous, and then his eyes lit up.

"What, you want to stay here?" and he bent down to get his answer from her face, as well as from her words.

"As your meanest servant," she repeated.

He straightened himself. "No, I cannot permit that," came from him sharply. "Not as my servant," he went on, as he saw her face fall, "as my guest. That is my condition. You shall come and go as pleases you. Your word shall be a command as much as mine, and woe to the one who disobeys. I am master here."

Rachel gazed dumbly before her; then she shivered. He noted the shiver.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked.

"Your mother came into the room this morning," was her reply; "she said nothing, but oh, how she looked at me! If only she had spoken her curses, and not looked them."

"You fear my mother?" he put in quickly. "I admit she does not take kindly to—to strangers,"—she knew what his hesitation meant,—"but if you will trust a man's word, you need have no fear of any one's hatred, loud or silent."

"True, you may protect me against your mother," she said pensively.

"Well?" he urged.

She made no answer, but the flush of maiden modesty spoke her thought clearly enough.

"You mean, who will protect you against me," he said. "I understand. As my servant, my pride of place will be your safeguard. As guest and equal, you think——"

There was a momentary silence, and then she looked at him fearlessly as she said: "I shall be my own safeguard. At the worst there will be occasion for another grave beyond the fence."

So Rachel stayed on at the farm. She had taken clear counsel with herself on the point. She would remain there—unless she were told to go before—she would remain until she could trust herself to leave the spot, where her mother's last breath hovered, without also leaving behind her heart, her reason, her faculties of life. And that after all was but the ignobler view;

there was another, far more cogent. What would her mother think if she went away at once? Would it not seem she had but waited to be relieved of the burden, to see how quickly her young feet could carry her unencumbered? No, this mother of hers deserved a little more tending, a little more watching. The desolate steppe was but sorry company for the living —how much more for the dead? The only thing that had given her pause at first was her host. What if his generosity meant more than lay on the surface? And then she recollected she had answered that question herself. But if she had still further need of reassurance, she had not long to wait for it. The day after the funeral she found the little hillock encased in massive slabs of granite.

"It is not meant so much for a monument," he explained to her, almost in tones of apology, "but the winter sometimes drives the wolves as far as the villages, and then all is grist that comes to their molars."

After that Rachel knew he could be trusted.

Since then five weeks had gone by. Rachel had become more or less an institution, but that was all the difference her presence made to her surroundings. She lived through the days aimlessly, dividing her time equally between her room and the steppe. With the lapse of time the sense of her loss and loneliness came home to her more fully, and steeped her in lethargy that numbed all desire of spontaneous action. She accepted her life as one accepts the inevitable; she knew that sometimes Gregor came and talked to her, and that she answered him—what or how seemed immaterial. But through it all she was clearly con-

scious of the man's word he had given her: he had not uttered an idle boast, he was, indeed, master in his house. No one molested her, no one made bold to ask questions. Not even Marfa. She obeyed her son's injunction thoroughly enough. If she never spoke to Rachel in anger, it was because she never spoke to her at all. Whenever the two met, Marfa walked past with averted head, so that Rachel never saw the malice looming from her eyes. And, therefore, her heart gave a sudden leap when one day Marfa stopped her in her course.

"What was your father?" she asked.

"A tanner," replied Rachel, making her answer ring pleasant.

"You lie, he was a beggar, and so was his father before him; for if there were not beggar's blood in your veins, you would not be content to eat the bread of idleness at the hands of a stranger."

And then she walked on, with a more springing step than Rachel had ever seen in her. Yes, those words must have lain upon her heavily.

Rachel, too, felt their weight as she pondered over them in her solitude; and from there she took them to Gregor.

"I must go from here," she told him.

He dropped the curry-comb he was carrying.

"Why?" he asked, stooping to pick it up.

"Because it has just come into my mind that I am eating the bread of idleness at the hands of a stranger."

"Do you want to go?" he asked in a curious tone, which seemed half pain, half anger.

"I should not have gone for a little while, but the thought is lashing me forth."

He turned away, consulting with himself.

"And suppose there is a way by which that which is yours now by favor would become yours by right?"

"What way could that be?" she queried, bewildered.

"Marry me."

She hung her head sadly. It was, indeed, time she should go; an abomination she was already, and now she had become a jest as well.

"You are startled," he continued, "and yet I thought I had prepared you for it sufficiently. Perhaps you did not see because your eyes were blinded with your sorrow."

"I saw nothing," she said simply.

"Then you shall hear now. From the moment I saw you, I knew I should love you. I shall not dissemble. I am no saint; it was not mere charity that made me pity you. My heart felt hungry for love. I had looked round me, but I found no one who might satisfy it, till you came. And therefore I would not let you pass by, because I know that Providence is no prodigal."

"But it is impossible," she said, her perplexity growing.

"Why is it impossible?" His tone was almost harsh.

"Your God is different to mine."

"What if He is? Let them fight it out among themselves which of them is right. We, too, shall know, when our time comes. Till then, let us take our Paradise beforehand. Keep your God, but give me your heart."

"Keep my God," she echoed; "you say that easily. How could I? You know the law of the land, which says that the Christian who marries a woman of my race, unless she turns proselyte, lays himself open to terrible penalties. Would it be requiting your kindness if I allowed you to hurl yourself into peril on my account? Ah! and you do not know how strange and unreal seem to me your gorgeous images, your crucifixes, your droning priests, and your bending of knees."

Gregor heard her with eager hopefulness. She was arguing, and her argument was half surrender.

"You mean you hate them," he replied; "you need have no compunction in saying so. To me as well they are not an indispensable delight. I will not admit more. Look, I am not asking for such a great thing. If your own belief is strong in itself, surely it will not take harm from a reverence or two before a crucifix, or a few drops of water from the font. I desire your pretending these things only because that will make you my wife incontestably, and leave your position assured, should anything happen to me. Why, when you have done with the priest, go straight to your chamber, and make your peace with the God of your belief."

"And will my conscience make peace with me?" she queried.

"Why not? You are not the first of your race who has given tribute to circumstance. Have you not heard of your people in Spain and the Inquisition?"

"But they were redeemed by their necessity."

"And are you not redeemed by yours?" he asked quickly. "Tell me, when you go from under my

roof, do you know where next you will find shelter? Suppose I refuse to lend you my horses, suppose I refuse to equip you for your journey; do you think you will live to set your foot across another threshold? Would that be pleasing to your God, or does your creed not count suicide amongst its sins? Think well—self-murder is not martyrdom."

Rachel stood pensive, her eyes seeking the distant horizon. He was right; before she had gone only as far as her eyes could reach now, she might be dead ten times over. No, she did not want to go hence; it was horrible to die in the desert—her mother had dreaded it, too. And, again, if she survived, would it not be worse? She would find no rest; her heart would be ever dragging her back to this spot. Once she went away, God knew if she would ever again set eyes on the granite-decked hillock by the fence. This house was home to her, her mother's spirit permeated it. It was here her mother's soul would come to seek her; and if it did not find her, it would wander about searching for her, and in the end perhaps miss its way back into heaven. Oh, she knew the transgression it would be to wed this Christian; and yet had her mother not blessed him? Such a blessing would sanctify a parricide, and the man who now pleaded with her, for her, should be hallowed in her eyes.

"I shall try to recompense your faith in me," she said, turning to him; "if I can add one grain to your contentment——"

"One grain?" he broke in fiercely, "a thousand grains, a million, a granary full; oh, my heart's desire!"

The vast courtyard was empty; only Kalash was scrutinizing them keenly from his kennel, and just then he set up a furious howl, for the strange woman's body was strained closely against his master's. Was it for this he had, in this same master's rescue, bitten those three wolves to death only last winter, that she should now come and do him grievous hurt, while he himself was uselessly, impotently, tugging at his chain?

"Now I feel strong enough for anything," said Gregor, releasing her; "I shall go and tell my mother."

"Would that I could help you," she said.

"You have done your share already; I must do mine."

Quickly he disappeared into the house. Marfa was sitting in her room, darning socks in pretended unconcern.

"The tale-bearer," she muttered, as she saw him enter; "she has told him. Now there will be thunder. Very well; my wheels, too, do not always turn on greased axles."

"Mother, I have something to say to you," began Gregor.

"I know—about her," said Marfa, jerking her head defiantly.

"You know?" asked Gregor, taken aback. "I have only just come to know it myself."

"Know what?"

"That she is going to be my wife."

Marfa showed her crooked, yellow teeth; it made one's own ache to look at them.

"Your wife? You mean before God, as the saying goes."

Gregor frowned. "And before the world, too—my lawful wife. We have surmounted all difficulties. She will turn Christian."

"Is that the only difficulty?" asked Marfa.

"I can think of no other that should count."

"Then why have you told me?"

"Because I thought you might like to know that you have two children now instead of one."

Marfa waited, although she had her answer ready.

"She is standing outside, mother. Go and tell her you are glad.

"It is true I have always longed for a daughter," was Marfa's answer; "but sooner than have such a one, may I go childless to the grave."

"As you please, mother," said Gregor, turning on his heel.

But before he had reached the door, he felt her agonized grip on his arm; she was on her knees.

"By the redemption of the crucified One, do not put this shame on me," she wailed; "do not set an accursed thing in the place I have made holy. Cast the pollution from out your doors. I knew an evil spirit had entered the house as soon as I saw her. She has woven impious spells around you; she has put this wayward desire into your bosom to work destruction for us both. She will cajole your heart from me, and unless you requite my love I shall die."

"If you loved me, as you say, you would not have cursed me."

"Forgive! I was frenzied with despair. It is all her doing; do you not see the ruin working already? Tell me if you have cause for complaint in anything.

Are you lacking in your comfort? Do you want better ministering? I shall leave my bed with the sun, and not return to it before midnight, and all the hours shall be spent in your service. Does that content you? Send her away—no, I shall not rise till you have promised."

"Stand up, mother," he said.

She bounded up instantly; there was no mistaking the manner of his bidding.

"Am I not an obedient parent?" she said scathingly. "And now, pray, go to her, and say you have seen me grovelling at your feet, that I have talked my mother-heart dry, and yet your ears remained empty. Tell her I have wrestled with her for my son, and that her witchcraft was stronger than my throes of prayer. Yes, tell her this, and when she pauses in the midst of her wanton kisses and her lecherous looks, let her laugh and make merry over my defeat. But tell her this as well: I, too, can laugh. Hark, I am laughing now: you can take that as my blessing on your wedlock."

Gregor listened to the peals of frantic merriment that jangled with each other like the clangings of fissured bells, and, amid all his terror, he felt a sort of tumultuous joy. No one could now gainsay his claim to his wife; he had bought her dearly at the price of his mother's laughter.

Rachel, too, heard it outside. She knew not what it betokened, but she clapped her hands to her ears, and wondered if the sound of it would travel as far as the grave by the fence. And then she was more glad than ever of the granite slabs that armored and made it impenetrable.

Such was the betrothal between Rachel and Gregor, quiet and without ostentation. Whoever knew of it was welcome to the knowledge, and could pass it on or keep it to himself. Nor did Marfa speak of it; she carried her mad jealousy about with her in sullen silence. Only when it threatened to choke her, she unbosomed herself to old Bastian, who had been her husband's right hand, and was now a sort of major-domo.

"Did you think," she would ask him, "did you think it would come to this, that when the young master chose his wife, we should have to make a secret of it, for fear of shame and ridicule?"

And Bastian would shake his head, and from clenched teeth grind out curses on the heathen interloper who had made havoc of his own hopes; for Bastian had himself a daughter, and he had thought his master's choice would be different.

But the lovers gave no heed to Marfa's silence, nor suspected Bastian's curses. They did not know that as often as not Marfa was crouching, greedily eavesdropping, outside the room where they were holding converse—perhaps because she took delight in torturing herself thus. One day, however, she overheard something that made her ears grow twice their length with curiosity. Amid the words of her own language came interspersed sounds of a strange tongue, which Rachel enunciated and Gregor repeated. It seemed they were going through a lesson; now and then Rachel called on Gregor to recite what she had taught him; it was just a verse which one might utter at a stretch without having to draw breath twice. It was a long

time, though, before he knew it without flaw or hitch, and more than once he excused himself by saying it was because he paid more attention to the teacher than to her teaching. But at last he had it pat, and then Rachel said quite solemnly:

"Now I am ready for the priest."

That did not enlighten Marfa much; but at any rate it did not come to her as a surprise when she spied them going down to the village chapel the following afternoon; and although they were in their everyday attire, she knew they would return as man and wife.

An hour after Gregor and Rachel stood before her.

"We thought it best not to trouble you, mother," Gregor was saying. "Why conceal it? You have never made a secret of your displeasure; your heart was not in my choice. And so we have not asked your company on our way to the altar, because you might have thought we were deriding you. You should be grateful to us for sparing you that thought. Show that you are, by one kind word to my bride."

For answer Marfa stepped to the window, and turned her back on them.

"Say something," repeated Gregor. And when her silence continued, he took Rachel by the hand, and led her out. And yet Marfa would have given a year of her life, could she have asked them one question—the meaning of that strange-tongued utterance of yesterday. But she never knew, for it was quite a private arrangement between Rachel and Gregor, and concerned no one else. It was a whim of hers, and Gregor was not in the mood to withhold her anything. So, di-

rectly they had left Marfa's presence, they took their way to the little vault by the fence, and there, by her mother's grave, Gregor placed a plain gold hoop on the first finger of Rachel's right hand, as slowly and clearly he pronounced, in the grand old Bible-tongue, the immemorial marriage formula:

"Behold, thou are consecrated unto me by this ring as a wife, according to the Law of Moses and of Israel."

III

It was the morning after the marriage when Gregor came to his mother, and told her she must give up the keys of the household. Marfa became purple as she asked his reason.

"You know the custom of our house as well as I," he replied; "the keys are kept by the wife of the ruling squire."

"How do you know she will not lay hold of all that is valuable and make off to-morrow morning?" inquired Marfa.

"As a matter of fact I don't know," he answered, "but I take the risk of that. And for another thing I would ask you never again to forget that she is my wife, whatever she was before."

"You may put a padlock on my lips, but not on my thoughts," said Marfa, defiantly. The next moment she regretted her words; they were imprudent. Still her exasperation might be counted to excuse much. But henceforth she would be cautious.

"Think what you like," said Gregor, in answer to her defiance, "but first give me the keys."

Marfa unfastened the belt from which they dangled in a bunch. Gregor nodded approvingly as he took them.

"It is much better so, mother. Make the best of things as they are. A soft heart begets a soft heart. We ask of you nothing but to let us love you."

"And therefore you do your best to humble me."

"A harsh word, mother; and even if it were true, there is kindness in it. So you know from the start that my wife takes precedence over you. It will save you disappointment hereafter."

Just then the door opened, and Bastian stepped in.

"By the way," went on Gregor, turning to him, "I noticed this morning that you passed my wife without taking off your cap and making a reverence. If that happens again, I shall order you to go bareheaded for the rest of the winter. Think of my words, mother."

He went out, and left Marfa and Bastian looking at each other.

"What did he tell you to think of?" asked Bastian, at last.

"Something that should make me dance with joy," answered Marfa, balefully, "something that will come to me in my sleep with dreams of delight; the Jew-girl first, and I second. But don't grudge me my pleasure; he has given you, too, something to keep in mind."

"Yes, if I do not crawl before her, it will be with frozen ears that I shall listen to the twitter of the birds next spring."

They were silent for a while, and then their eyes met, and each knew what the other's brain harbored.

"You speak first," said Marfa; "you are the man."

"But your hurt is the sorest," replied Bastian.

And Marfa spoke.

Three days after Gregor had to go to the winter fair, fifteen miles off, to make purchases. He started early, and took his swiftest horses, but even thus he could not be back much before midnight.

An hour after he had gone Marfa remarked to Bastian:

"I think there is no time like the present."

"Everything is ready," answered the latter; "by act of Providence I forgot to give Kalash his supper last night, and he had no breakfast this morning; he would eat his own mother. One of the links in his chain is very loosely riveted; just a little provocation, and one does not know what he may do."

And Bastian laughed, as if, after all, he had a pretty shrewd idea what form Kalash's action would take.

"Call her," said Marfa.

A minute or two later Rachel came in, surprised and diffident.

"You sent for me," she said.

Marfa did not answer immediately; her nether-lip twitched as if she found it hard to contain her emotion. Then she took Rachel's hand.

"You seem to find it strange," she began; "shame on me that you should. Hear me. I have considered what I am doing—how I am undermining the happiness of my house, how I am alienating from me my son, and thrusting away a daughter's love. I have begun to feel cold and strange at my own hearth, and the fault is mine, and mine only. So I would make it

good before it grows beyond atonement. Or is it too late already?"

Marfa lifted her eyes; they were wet. Rachel's own filled at the sight. She had never heard of crocodile's tears.

"Too late, mother? Nothing is too late till a heart-throb after death; and we have a good while to live yet. Aye, it will be a new life for you and all of us. You shall never feel cold again. I shall be always nigh, and my heart's warmth shall make yours glow. As for Gregor, we two shall make common cause to strew his path with flowers, to smooth from his brow the wrinkles that come to a man in the affairs of life by our joint love-service—not in the rivalry that halves the effect, but in the fellowship that doubles it. And then you will only begin to know how good it is to be a mother."

Marfa plucked her hand from Rachel's, which had become too fervid in its clasp.

"How mistaken I have been in you," she said, "and yet I should have trusted Gregor; his feelings could not lead him far astray. However, all that is done with; there only remains for me to seal our reconciliation. I must prove to you I am in earnest. I have not given you a marriage-gift. You shall see."

She turned to the wardrobe, and took from among its contents a cotton frock, dyed crimson, such as the better class of the women in those parts affect.

"It is yours," she said, holding it out to Rachel; "it will make a brave show, and will set off your beauty as nothing else."

Rachel smiled with pleasure, but presently her mien

changed, and she became disconcerted. The garment exhaled a stale, fœtid odor.

"Quick, on with it," exclaimed Marfa, briskly; "I am dying to see how it becomes you. You must wear it all day, and greet Gregor in it when he comes home to-night; then he will not need words to tell him what has happened."

And, while speaking, she stripped Rachel of the frock she was wearing, and forced the other upon her. Rachel offered no resistance, because she was afraid of offending Marfa by giving token of the distaste she felt for her gift. Marfa stepped back to look at her; then she shook her head in dissatisfaction.

"It is so dark in this room, and the tint, for all I can see, might be a drab yellow, instead of this costly carmine. Ah, I have it! Just go out into the courtyard, and walk down the length of it, and then we shall see what color the sunlight will paint it. I shall watch here from the window."

Rachel gladly fell in with the suggestion. The noisome exhalation was no trick of her fancy. It became stronger with each breath she drew. Probably it was some pungent disinfectant, which had preserved it from the moths, and which the clear, frosty air would quickly dissipate. A moment after she was outside, looking up at Marfa, who nodded approvingly. With a smile—for her heart was in the thing—Rachel strolled past, on parade as it were, on towards Kalash's kennel. As she came within five yards of it, she saw the hound struggle to his feet, and yap hungrily, as he snuffed the air with quivering nostrils. Rachel stopped wonderingly. As a rule the animal greeted her with a whine of pleas-

ure; perhaps it was the flaunting color that now disquieted him. She took a step forward to pacify him, but the menacing howl that assailed her made her shrink back aghast. Suddenly he became very still, his body stiffened, and his eyes grew blood-rimmed, and then with a furious onset he hurled himself forward all the length of his chain. He alighted within half a yard of Rachel's feet. Terrified she turned to retrace her steps. Two more tugs like that, and Kalash would break either his chain or his neck—it was as likely the chain. But when she came to the door she found it closed. She tried the latch—it would not work; no doubt the rusty old thing had caught somehow. However, she heard Marfa come shuffling down the passage; in a moment or two she would be safe enough. And the danger was urgent—Kalash had become frantic. Two stout wisps of straw had got twined about his feet, and the new impediment infuriated him beyond bounds.

"Quick," whispered Rachel, "the chain cannot hold much longer."

She heard Marfa puffing and panting on the other side, but she did not seem to be making much headway.

"Quick, quick," urged Rachel. "O God, he is loose!"

"Christ's mercy," shrieked Marfa, "I have got my finger jammed in the lock, and cannot move. Run! run to the outhouses; if not, you are lost—he has gone mad!"

Rachel stared stupefied at the ravening brute. The chain lay snapped, but he was still struggling with his fetters of straw, which he had writhed into a hopeless

tangle. That was her chance. If she could get out by the gate and slam it, she might reach the corn-shed before he had time to vault the palisade. But when she had got half way, she felt him behind her. She heard the rattle of the broken links and the swish of the trailing straw, and presently she caught also his hard-drawn breath whistling in little yelps of anger. Yet through it all another sound struck her ears—a sound of rumbling wheels and galloping horses. Perhaps that meant deliverance, and with the fleetness which death gives to its own quarry, she flung forward, dashed past the gate, and out into the open road. And the next instant she felt two hairy paws upon her shoulder, a bristly tongue rasped against her cheek, and then a voice she did not immediately recognize roared: "Down, Kalash, down."

Down went the hairy paws, and the great brute cringed whimpering on the ground. And from that Rachel knew, even without looking, who it was that had saved her.

"What is this?" asked Gregor, stepping up to her and catching her round the waist. His face was white, and his voice hoarse, as if that one shout had broken its strength.

Between her sobs Rachel gave an account of what had happened, and as Gregor listened his brows came low down over his eyes.

"And if I had not forgotten my money-belt, I should have come home to find you in twenty pieces," he said at last. "Twenty pieces," he repeated, as if there were some deep cause for the repetition. His eyes fell on Kalash. The brute crouched low, panting and whin-

ing, and now that he saw his master's gaze upon him, he crept forward inch by inch, rubbed his head against Gregor's top-boots, and peered up piteously into his face. But Gregor's look did not soften at these signs of contrition. He thought hard for a moment, and then said: "Come, Kalash."

So he walked to the middle of the yard, his arm still supporting Rachel, and Kalash following abjectly at his heels. Outside Marfa's window he stopped.

"Turn round the other way for a moment," he told Rachel. She obeyed without giving a thought to what he meant. Immediately there was a loud report, and as she started round, she saw Kalash motionless on his side, with a big hole in his forehead.

"Oh, why did you kill him?" she moaned. "Did you not tell me you owe him your life?"

"I owe him mine, but he nearly took yours in payment," said Gregor, pocketing his still smoking revolver. "That cancels the debt, and I wanted to make sure he would not offend again."

Just then something caught his attention.

"What is this smell?" he asked, stooping down and bringing the hem of her frock close to his face. Then his eyes dilated, and he gnashed his teeth.

"As I thought; poor brute, it wasn't your fault after all," he muttered, casting a swift glance at Kalash; "you could not help protesting that blood was never meant to be used as a dye."

And then he said, raising his voice curiously:

"I must tell my mother not to give you any more presents."

IV

"Sleep, baby, sleep,
Your father minds the sheep;
Your mother minds the cooking-pot.
Sleep, baby, sleep."

So sang Rachel to her three-months-old, rhythmically dandling it in her arms. The said baby listened attentively to these barefaced attempts on its wakefulness, and rewarded them by opening its eyes to their widest. And then, having raised its potential eyebrows as far as they would go, it broke into a smile of derision. But Rachel evidently considered this as a compliment to her powers of song, to judge by the way she pressed the nondescript bundle to her heart, and rained kisses on the little lips.

"What about my turn?" asked Gregor, who watched the pair from a little distance.

"There—just one; she says she does not like your kisses; they taste too much of hair," jested Rachel, holding the child up to him.

"Her mother thinks differently, at any rate," replied Gregor, as he took his turn, and too much of it.

"You flatter yourself," retorted Rachel, smilingly; "she only acts differently."

"So much the worse for her, if her actions do not coincide with her thoughts. And for punishment it will be a long time before she will again have the chance of being inconsistent."

"Not so long as a year," she said, raising her face to his.

He waved her off. "Your thoughts are yours, and my kisses are mine," he said.

"Keep them, they are not worth asking for twice."

"And therefore you shall ask three times."

"Asking for kisses makes them sour."

"Does it?" he queried anxiously. "And I hate vinegar."

And so he took immediate precaution to forestall the contingency against which she had warned him.

Marfa sat at the further end of the room, plying her knitting needles. The horn spectacles over her beaked nose gave her the aspect of an owl, nor did the expression of face with which she from time to time regarded the group by the fire do much to enhance her beauty. When it came to the kissing episode, she got up and went out.

A long silence followed her exit. Gregor stared into the blaze, wondering, as he did frequently, what had made his father depart so far from local traditions as to build the heating apparatus in the shape of an open hearth instead of the customary glazed brick structure. Then he looked at Rachel, and it struck him that he, too, had considerably deviated from local traditions. And Gregor hoped he had inherited the good fortune of his father, who had never been known to express dissatisfaction with his experiment. So far there was no reason to doubt it.

Rachel was musing on Marfa's exit.

"Your mother has not yet taken me to her heart," she said at last.

Gregor did not answer; had he done so, it would have been only to question his mother's possession of a heart.

"She was kind to me just once," went on Rachel, reflectively, "the day she gave me the red frock, and I heard you speak to her so harshly; perhaps that was what made her turn cold again."

"I don't know; I have not asked her," replied Gregor, curtly.

"I did, once, and her answer was such that I have never put her a question since."

"I can hear Feodor with the horses," said Gregor, getting up with alacrity, as though glad of the diversion.

"Can you not go another day?"

"No, I have put it off as long as I could; each day we get nearer the spring the price of the sheepskins falls. In another week or two I should have to give them away, only to be rid of them."

"Yes, I suppose you must go," she sighed; "look, baby, look at poor daddy going away, from the beautiful fire out into the cruel snow, and leaving us all alone. Never mind; we shall tell each other stories, and the time will pass more quickly; but not quickly enough," she went on, looking up at her husband.

"I shall hurry, you can be sure," he replied.

"Yes, because——"

"Well?"

"Because—don't laugh—I feel afraid. I dreamt three nights in succession that I was wearing that red frock, and Kalash had broken his chain."

Gregor wrinkled his forehead. "Dreams are stupid," he said; "at best they are a bad habit, and my wife must not have any bad habits."

"I shall never dream again so long as I live," said Rachel, timidly. Gregor had spoken to her somewhat

harshly; was it because he did not like to be reminded that he had Kalash on his conscience? Outside the horses were neighing and rattling their collars.

"So then, till to-morrow night," said Gregor, his voice softening down again into its old tenderness; "and if you are good and take care of baby, I shall perhaps bring you a present."

"Then you may as well give it to me at once," she answered, smiling.

"This will do for a guarantee," he said as he kissed her.

Long after she heard the vehicle clatter out of the courtyard, Rachel sat and gazed into the roaring blaze. She was thinking how happy she was. And the proof of her happiness was that she could think of it, gauge and fathom it, without feeling shame or fear. In all these months there had not come to her a single misgiving, not a throb of contrition at what she had done. And that was a sure sign that God had forgiven her, and her only way of showing herself grateful was to accept her happiness and feel it to the full. Now, too, she saw the purport of Marfa's enmity. Marfa was the saving clause in her decree of fate, redeeming her lot from the too utter perfectness which the human heart is not wide enough to house. And, therefore, she must pray henceforth that the edge of Marfa's malice should never become blunt, so long as it remained but a sharp sword sawing the air.

The opening of the door interrupted her. Old Bastian looked in.

"The spinners from the village are here," he announced.

"Why do they not come when my husband is at home?" asked Rachel.

"They did not know master was going away; but I can tell them to come another time."

Rachel was in a dilemma. The task of checking the flax and paying for it, as well as the weighing out of more raw material, would take at least half an hour; and if she attended to it, she would have to leave her baby to look after itself all that time, for it was madness to think of carrying it out with her into the draughty flax-barn right across the further end of the yard. On the other hand, if she sent the spinners away, the poor old women would have to make the toilsome journey twice over, and in addition wait two whole days for the sorry pittance, which no doubt was urgently needed. And then again she would please Gregor by showing him how well she administered his affairs, and what a trusty deputy he left on the estate during his absence.

This last decided her. "Tell them to wait—I am coming," she answered Bastian.

The baby had at last yielded to the temptations of the lullaby, and, from past experience, was good for at least a two hours' sleep. Rachel tucked it snugly into the wicker-cot, without noticing that a shoe had slipped from one of the tiny feet, and had fallen some little way from the cradle. And then, after a long look at the child, she went out.

After an interval of two minutes Marfa came in, her face white and her teeth set. For a moment she listened anxiously; then she stepped quickly to the hearth, snatched from it a flaring brand, and placed it close to the baby's cot. She paused at the door till she had

seen the tentacles of flame grip the flimsy wickerwork so that they would no longer relax their hold, and then she hurried away. This time the sharp sword had not fallen on empty space.

Rachel finished her work in less time than she had anticipated. As she got back into the corridor, a presentiment of evil came floating towards her on wings of noisome air. But when she got into the room, it took her some little time to understand the meaning of the black, charred horror that stared at her from among sickening fumes. And when at last she comprehended, she went to pick up the baby shoe, which lay where it had dropped, and quietly placed it in her bosom.

Gregor came home late the following afternoon, and found Rachel watching by the little coffin.

"They have put it in there—that is all I know," was her only answer to all his inquiries.

Then he went to Marfa; he came upon her stealthily, with his eyes in ambush to note her first look as she caught sight of him. Her features were bronze.

"How it occurred?" she echoed, her voice matching her mien. "Had I been there, it would not have occurred at all; and since I was not, why do you ask me?"

"Perhaps a spark jumped from the fire and lighted on the cradle," suggested Gregor, watching her as before.

"Perhaps," she replied.

"She must have left the room when it happened."

"I do not keep count of her comings and goings."

"But did you hear nothing—see nothing?"

"Nothing beyond what everyone else heard and saw; but perhaps Bastian did."

"Bastian?"

"So he says; but I should not have any ears left, if I listened to the maunderings of every old fool."

Gregor stepped out, and presently returned, dragging Bastian after him.

"Now tell me what you told my mother," he said.

"I have nothing to tell, master," whined Bastian, "indeed, nothing."

"Speak, before I squeeze it from your throat."

"Master, I cannot—it is too terrible."

"Then it will amuse me; I like hearing of terrible things. Now take a long breath and begin."

Bastian looked questioningly at Marfa; but Marfa shrugged her shoulders, and turned away.

"Well, then, it was yesterday afternoon," said Bastian, with apparent recklessness; "the spinners had come up from the village with their work, and I went to tell the mistress, and she answered she would be with them presently. I had just got to the end of the passage, when I thought of another message I had for her; so I went back, and as I opened the door——"

Bastian paused, and put his hand to his eyes.

"Never mind the pantomime," said Gregor; "take a longer breath."

"As I opened the door, there stood the mistress, with her back to me, waving her arms and droning a strange, weird tune, while the cradle crackled—and then I ran from the horror of it. But I know it will pursue me till I die, and after."

Gregor came close to him; in his hand he held the silver crucifix he had detached from the wall.

"Kneel and swear," he said.

That was a thing Bastian had not bargained for. He was to jeopardize his salvation, but then the danger of instant death excused much. Moreover, the fact that he was forswearing himself to the destruction of an infidel might count for something; he also believed in the efficacy of wax tapers. And so he swore.

But it was not so much Bastian's oath that impressed Gregor with the possible truth of his story; it was a vague misgiving of his own that struggled up from his consciousness quite suddenly, as though the seed of it had there lain dormant, and had only been waiting for the quickening impulse, no matter whence it came. It struck him with the force of a revelation: what if his love had really made him blind? What if she was not all he saw in her, all she pretended to be? His memory caught at the words she had uttered but yesterday: that she felt otherwise than she acted. True, she had said it in a jest, but might it not as well be the perverse defiance of deceit, which flaunts itself recklessly before the eyes it has hoodwinked? And that roused in him the quick sensitiveness, the instinct of alarm, the unreasoning fear which are bred by a life of loneliness—and what loneliness is there like that of the steppe? And then, having found his trail, he tracked it relentlessly. He walked back by himself all the length of way he had travelled in her company, and beneath his footsteps sprang up the weeds of distrust, coiled themselves round his feet, and made him stumble. And at last he stood again before the terrible mystery which he had made his starting-point. What was he to do? How was he to reach the truth? Tax her openly with Bastian's story? Well, she would disclaim, remon-

strate, disarm his suspicion by her passionate denials. There was nothing to be gained by that; it would only put her on her guard. No, he must wait and watch; he must lull her into security, and then, in some unguarded moment, she would betray herself.

So he waited and watched; and after not many days there reached him the first intimation that his watchfulness would not remain without issue. A change was coming over Rachel. In the days immediately succeeding the child's death, she had sought his company, had nestled against him for comfort, as she made it appear, although preserving a persistent silence as to the occurrence. But before long her mood veered round. She availed herself less and less often of his presence, even letting slip the most obvious occasions, and when she could not possibly avoid him, she submitted to the necessity with ill-disguised constraint. And so the time came when he felt her shrink from his embrace, and her lips puckered beneath the pressure of his own, as at the touch of white-hot iron. Gregor followed the gradations, followed them with a cruel joy that made his heart leap in throbs of agony. Now only he came to know how much he loved her—by the lust of hatred which her recoil aroused in him. He revelled to see that look of fearful apprehension in her eyes; and therefore he redoubled his kisses, because he knew the only way to kill his love was to kiss it dead.

But it was not Rachel's fault that she shrank from her husband; it was due to the visitor that called on her night after night. No sooner had she closed her eyes in sleep, than she saw her baby close by her pillow. She not only saw, she also heard it. It was saying—quite distinctly:

"Mother, my little shoe, my little shoe."

And so it would go on importuning, till Rachel awoke to stare in frozen horror into the pitiless gloom, which was but as the mirror wherein she might see the reflection of her ineffable terror. And out of the darkness she carried it with her into the daylight; it hovered before her eyes amid the sun-motes; it rang in her ears above the spring-benedictions of the birds—that thin piping voice begging for its little shoe. And she could tell nobody of it, least of all her husband. She had not forgotten his hard words when she had narrated him her dream about Kalash, and the tale of this strange apparition would certainly find small grace with him. Even if he were not angry with her over it, he might see in it no evidence of her love, in that she did not spare him the knowledge of her tribulation.

And, therefore, she cooped it up within herself, hoping that it was but an hallucination of the moment, the creation of her overwrought brain, which could be crushed out of existence by mere force of will. So she fought against it with frenzied strength, till she felt bruised and broken, as though she had been butting her soul against a wall of stone. And when that availed nothing, she sat herself down, in the resoluteness of her despair, to think out calmly, quietly, the meaning of the prodigy, and to trace the voice it had taken to itself back to the cause that gave it speech; else she could never hope to silence it. "My little shoe—my litle shoe!" Oh, to catch the inner drift of it!

And one day, when her desire for light had driven her to the pitch when conjecture turns into prophecy, it all came to her in a flash of inspiration. She recol-

lected dimly a tradition current among her people, the tradition which had taken rank as a sacred ordinance, that in case of persons killed by fire everything that appertained to the charred remains must likewise be consigned to the grave. And though the baby-shoe had by accident escaped destruction, its rightful place was with its dead owner. Yet all the time Rachel had carried it in her bosom, the memento of the short-lived mother-joy she had tasted. And now her child had come to claim its own, and to rebuke her for her selfishness. But Rachel did not stop there. She felt this was not the only import of the message from the dim Beyond. It was not intended to remind her only of this one observance she had transgressed, but of the entire code of laws and precepts she had broken through, of her people from whom she had severed herself, of the jealous God she had forsaken, when she knelt to the idols made of human hands, however much it had been only in appearance. So her retribution had found her after all; she had thought her happiness was a barricade which her conscience could never scale. And now it was wreaking its vengeance on her more fiercely for having been kept so long at bay. It upbraided her with having preferred a chance refuge to the sheltering wings of her nation's Providence; it cried shame on her faint-heartedness, which had set at naught the example of centuries. And finally—ah, there its sting was sharpest!—it asked her:

"What answer will you make to your mother?"

Rachel did not know, but she began to think—at once, for she did not know how many years it might take her to fashion a reply to that query.

That was how she came to shrink from her husband. He was the embodiment of her sin. As he had been her temptation, so he now was her reproach. But if she trembled at his embraces, if his endearments made her shudder, it was only with fear, with a terrifying sense of the forbidden. He was still the same to her—her all in all; but because she had bartered everything she had possessed in exchange for him, she must, for that very reason, look on him as unlawful property. And the pain of that thought stung her into rebellion. No, she did not want to be told of her offence; she would not have her conscience make havoc of her peace of heart; she wanted to be happy, happy as she had been before; happy though the world, aye, and the next world, too, perished over it. It was the little shoe that had begun the mischief; well, she would bury this little shoe, and with it the spectre that was haunting her; bury it so deep that it could not possibly have a resurrection.

And so it came that, a little while after, Marfa had a curious story to tell her son, when he returned home after a full day's absence.

"I heard her creep out in the dead of night," she told him, "and then I called Bastian, and together we followed her. First she went to the tool-house, and tried to enter, but it was locked. After that she crossed over to the timber-shed, and from there she took a long, flat log, and passed out by the gate. Cautiously we tracked her, all the way to the cemetery. And when she had come to the child's grave, she commenced to burrow busily, but because of the clumsy implement she could not get very far, and at last she flung herself down, and

tore ravenously at the soil with her hands. Did I not tell you she was an evil spirit? And now she wants to dig up what is left of the little angel she has killed, and use it for her rites and incantations to bring destruction on us all. Last week one of the bulls gored his own heifer—is that not a sign? And at Michaelmastide—although I would not tell you of it—the witches flew in and out of the house, despite the three red crosses I had marked on the outer door."

Gregor heard her in silence, with a peculiar smile about his lips, and finally he went to his wife, and looked at her fingers. They were scratched and torn in many places. And when he saw Marfa again he said to her:

"Watch and tell me what happens the next time I am away."

And, surely enough, a week after, Marfa had the same story for him—the locked tool-house, the walk to the cemetery, the blunt log, the burrowing, the foiled attempt. This time Gregor did not answer even with a smile, but for two days after he went about without eating or drinking, his brows wrinkled in thought. Towards the evening of the third, he had the horses harnessed, and made his arrangements as usual when he intended a prolonged absence. When he said goodbye to Rachel, she did not seem disconsolate at his departure, but her hands trembled, and there was a feverish look in her eyes.

Just before starting Gregor whispered to Marfa:

"Tell Bastian to leave the tool-house open and to place the strongest spade close to the entrance."

Then he drove off, but only as far as the village, and

stabling his horses in the disused smithy, he made his way back to the cemetery, and took up his post behind one of the acacia trees that fringed the inside of the wall.

So he stood, motionless, patiently peering into the darkness, through which the wan moonlight trickled sparingly. Now he would see for himself whatever there was to see. And when he had seen . . . .

It was past midnight; Gregor felt himself taking root in the soil, when his ear caught the sound of hurrying footsteps. He would have recognized those footsteps amid the tramp of an army; he knew also by the ring of iron against the hard gravel that Marfa had given Bastian his message. And then his eyes became glowing coals that set the gloom on fire wherever they struck it. Yes, there she was; she was standing by the grave, and now her spade was flinging up the sod in frantic haste. For a moment or two he watched her; then a few noiseless strides brought him to her side. She did not hear him, and her spade plied on.

"Vampire," he said softly, taking the implement out of her hands.

With a stifled cry she fell forward, and huddled her head in her arms. Slowly, deliberately he lifted the spade high in the air, the blade turned sideways, and for an instant he stood measuring his aim. Then, with a sudden thought, he flung it from him. Tenderly his left arm stole round her neck, his lips burned passionately on hers, while his free hand fumbled for the dirk in his belt.

"No, you shall die a cleaner death—for the sake

of the happy hours you have given me," he whispered, as the steel ate its way into her heart.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

Next morning Marfa and Bastian were busy spreading the news that the young mistress had gone sleep-walking to the grave-yard, and there had become the victim of some miscreant's foul play. And then Bastian went and told his daughter to put on her prettiest dress, and make herself conspicuous in the eyes of the master.

But Rachel never had a successor, there was no time for that. Three days after her funeral, Marfa came upon her son lying stiff and stark in his room, the posion phial at his side. On the table she found his testament:

"I can find no rest; and so I have followed her into the land where there is no falsehood, to learn from her the truth."

COSSACK AND CHORISTER

ANYBODY with half an eye to proportion could see what an ill-assorted couple they were. Among their most obtrusive dissimilarities were these: the one was called Casimir, the other Jacob, the names betokening Slav and Semitic descent respectively. Again, Casimir had to stoop under most of the doorways through which he passed, whereas Jacob, when standing his tallest, just reached Casimir's elbow, a circumstance to be explained by the fact that the one had been a full-grown man for years, while the other had still most of his growing to get through with. But the most radical difference surely was this: Casimir was a spear-bearing, fierce-whiskered member of his Majesty's imperial army, Cossack department; and Jacob a soprano chorister in the local synagogue. How, in spite of these desperate inequalities, there came to be any connection between the two was a miracle.

It is the fashion to explain miracles by natural causes; this is a case in point. To bring about primarily a reachable distance between Casimir and Jacob, it was fated that certain turbulent minds among the gentry of the district wherein Jacob lived should become suddenly troubled by the ghosts of Sobietski and Kosciusko and the spectre of Poland's departed greatness, which came to them clamoring for a speedy reincarnation. These turbulent minds had long failed to see what connection—excepting that of the railway

—there should be between St. Petersburg and Warsaw, and why people should not be allowed to do as they liked in and with their own country. They thereupon took to disseminating this opinion, at first privately and with circumspection, then more broadcast and openly, until rumors of it reached the keen-set ears of the governmental authorities, who with great gusto straightway made a blood-curdling report of it to headquarters. There is a fixed and constitutional remedy for these cases of political hay fever, administered in the shape of two or three Pulks of Cossacks, whose presence generally serves as a cooling-draught for the hot-headed restorationists. That is how Casimir came to Lotz.

There was a great deal of excitement when the regiment rattled into the little town, and halted on the market-place. Everybody was there to receive them, from the mayor to the knacker, just to show there was no ill-feeling towards the arrivals, and the patriots felt very small at sight of the swarthy, bearded faces and gleaming lance-points. Of course Jacob was there, bearing himself very calmly in the possession of a clean conscience; but all the same, he felt rather frightened when presently one of the men rode straight up to him and said gruffly:

"Do you know one Pototski, a miller?"

There was nothing formidable about the question, and Jacob felt particularly adapted for answering it.

"Yes, I know him," he piped; "my mother lives in his courtyard."

"Come along, then, and show the way—I am billeted there," said the man; and before Jacob knew what was

happening, he found himself whipped up by the nape of his jacket, and seated astride in the saddle. In a second or two he grew alive to the situation, and determined to make the best of it. Horse-riding was a new sensation to him; when his father, who had been a butcher, was living, he had occasionally been allowed to ride cattle to the shambles. But this was different; to ride on one horse with a Cossack was an experience to relate and remember, and would no doubt raise his prestige among the knickerbocker population of the town by several inches.

This was the first contact between Casimir and Jacob, but it needed more than that to bring about an acquaintance. And this time, despite the shoulder-shrug of the rationalist, the hand of Providence was stretched forth visibly. Two days after, Jacob was sitting near the window to catch the last streaks of the dying daylight; for he was particularly anxious to finish carving his bulrush whistle that evening. It was turning out beautifully—the rind was tough and fresh, and would not require much hammering to remove the stalk from within, and Jacob expressed his satisfaction thereat in tones of loud and clear-voiced melody. He did not notice what he was singing—singing had become a mechanical action with him; he sang with as little self-consciousness as a bird, and, therefore, because his music came from the heart, it went to the heart. In the distance there was a sound of rioting, where the soldiers had gathered in the canteen; but sometimes, when Jacob's voice rose especially clear, there was a lull, as if they were listening. Jacob noticed neither the noise nor the silence, but worked on busily. His

mother sat at the table with a pile of goose-feathers before her; she was stripping the down from the quills to make feather coverlets of them; it was what she earned her living by.

The twilight waned, and the room was filled with the argent glimmer of the full moon. "We shall save a rushlight to-night—God is good," thought Jacob, and sang on. Just then there was a sound of heavy steps walking as though trying to tread down their heaviness; they came nearer, and paused before the door. Jacob heard them, and stopped singing; and instantly the latch lifted, and a towering form strode across the threshold.

"Who was singing here?" said a voice from somewhere among the rafters.

Jacob's mother screamed—she understood Russian because she had served as cook in Odessa many years before her marriage; and the question suggested to her answers in the shape of knouts and prisons and Siberia, and fear tied her tongue.

"Who was singing here?" came the question more urgently.

The woman sprang up, and threw herself on her knees before the intruder.

"Spare us, spare us, your Honor," she stammered; "the boy did not know he was doing wrong. Did he disturb your Honor in your sleep? or is it not lawful to sing the song?" And then she turned to her son, and became fluent in chiding him. "Did I not tell thee, rascal, to let alone these songs of the Gentiles? Have I not begged of thee to sing the synagogue tunes like 'He is the Tree of Life,' and 'There is none like

Him among the gods,' and such things, whereat none can take umbrage? To be sure, your Honor, I have warned him, but he is obstinate and foolhardy: do not let your hand fall too heavy on us, for he is but a child without sense, and my husband served the Emperor loyally for twelve years."

The Cossack heard her patiently, then he smiled—at least Jacob saw his teeth gleam in the moonlight.

"My good woman," he said at last; "I have not come to harm you. There is nothing punishable in the boy's song, although it is the cause of my coming; but that is no business of yours. Come here, little throstle; who taught you that song?"

"What song, your Honor?" whimpered Jacob, still very much frightened.

"The 'Minka, Minka' song."

And Jacob told him how there had come to the choir two years ago one Aaron, a tenor, and he it was who had taught him the song. Aaron had learned it on his wanderings, somewhere in Livonia, and this same Aaron had afterwards gone to Warsaw, and had there become a famous opera singer. Casimir nodded his head. Quite true, the song came from Livonia, for that he could vouch. That was where he had first heard it, and that was where he had met the Minka who had sung it to him in the drowsy summer afternoons, and had given the sunset a golden glory such as he had never seen before. And then, when his regiment had been ordered further, the memory of song and singer and sunset had followed him hauntingly, till he stretched out his arms in vain, impotent longing for the dreamlike gladness of the past. Ever since he had

seen no beauty in melody, nor in the smile of maidens, nor in the gorgeous phantasms of the summer sky. But at the sound of the self-same song it was as though by a magic touch the old world were rising from its ruins; he was again lying on the heather with Minka beside him chasing the importunate gnats from his forehead, and singing with that soul-bewildering sweetness which only her happiness of heart could have taught her. And again he went through the short-lived period of Paradise—from the first mute comprehending look to the agonized bliss of the last embrace.

Jacob looked at him in wonder. What made the stern-faced man draw his lips together as if he were in pain? What put the far-away look into his eyes? Jacob would have pitied him, if there had been a man on the face of the earth bold enough to pity a Cossack.

Casimir took a chair, and made himself at home.

"Will you sing that song again, little man?" he said.

Jacob was quite willing; he had lost all fear. The great big soldier spoke very kindly, almost pleadingly, so he began:

> "Minka, the plain is asleep,
> Minka, the moon——"

Casimir stopped him. "Wait a minute," he said, and got up to shut the open window. Jacob thought he looked jealous that anything of the tune should float away, and be lost on the air.

Jacob began again, putting all his soul into his voice:

"Minka, the plain is asleep,
Minka, the moon is blind;
Minka, the stars breathe deep—
Their breath is the whispering wind."

And so it went on.

Casimir looked up with a sigh when it was finished. "It does not seem so long ago, nor so far away after all," he muttered; and then, stroking Jacob's head, he said, "Good-night, little man; may the saints watch over you."

He went out very slowly, stopping to smile back from the door. The next evening he came again, and Jacob had to sing the "Minka" song once and twice and three times. Casimir tapped time with his foot, and tried to hum a bar or two under his breath in his bassoon gurgle; but it was not a success, for he sang dreadfully out of tune, and at last he gave it up, and let Jacob sing on alone.

The third evening he came again. "I have brought you a present," he said; and out he fetched three big buttons of shining bronze, such as are worn on military uniforms, and a rusty spur. Jacob was delighted, especially with the bronze buttons, which were quite a treasure; for among his playmates they each counted equal in value to a whole dozen of the ordinary brass or bone article, and Jacob had been slightly out of luck in the button-game lately. As for the spur, it would sell for two copecks any hour in the day.

Henceforth Cossack and chorister were inseparable; wherever one was seen, the other was sure to be not many miles off. Jacob certainly neglected no opportunity of being about with his stalwart friend, and by

force of example was gradually assuming a martial swagger that would have made him ludicrous in the eyes of his comrades, if they had had room for anything but jealousy of his glory.

It must be said, however, that there was nothing virulent in their envy. For the most part it resolved itself into a regretful self-pity; everybody cannot be so lucky as to have a real live Cossack for his body-guard. The chief exception was Schmeyrel, the red-haired, pimple-faced fellow-chorister of Jacob. He also sang treble, but though he had an exceptionally good voice, it did not come up to Jacob's by a size and a half; and consequently it never fell to Schmeyrel's lot to sing the treble-solos wherever such occurred—a fact which he looked upon as a flagrant mistake in the dispensation of God's justice. He therefore did not love Jacob, and was not always complimentary in his criticisms of his favored rival.

"Do you think he can sing?" he used to say. "If you throw your boots against the wall, you will have more music than you could ever squeeze out of his voice."

And now, when he saw the intimate relations between Jacob and Casimir, his bile was full to bursting. It only needed a sight of Jacob flying by on the Cossack's horse, with Casimir gripping him solicitously behind, to spoil Schmeyrel's appetite for the day; and as this sort of thing occurred at least once every twenty-four hours, he was in a fair way of dwindling down to a bag of bones. Thus desperate measures became necessary. Supplanting Jacob was impossible. Schmeyrel knew he sat too firm in the saddle of the

Cossack's horse and the Cossack's affections. He therefore set about equalizing matters by getting for himself a Cossack of his own.

How it was he smuggled himself into Sturak's good graces remained a mystery. His mother did not connect the event with the mysterious disappearance of the liver sausages and onion-strings from the hay-loft, nor did his father associate it with the abnormally rapid decline of his brandy and tobacco. It was only when the roast goose that was to have served for the Sabbath dinner took wings unto itself and flew away that Schmeyrel's tactics of ingratiation fell under momentary suspicion. But he had attained his object; he was allowed to walk by Sturak's side, clutching him by the skirt of his coat; he could touch his lance, sit on his horse, and avail himself of all the amenities of having a Cossack for an acquaintance. The one shadow of dissatisfaction consisted in the thought that herein also Jacob had outdistanced him: Jacob's Cossack was the Colonel's special orderly, whereas Sturak was a mere rank-and-file man.

Strange to say, Sturak had himself remarked on this inequality of things, though not from Schmeyrel's point of view. He saw no reason why Casimir should be orderly and not he. There were privileges, perquisites, exemptions, connected with the post which made it desirable to have. Sturak had never failed to observe on the drill-ground how much more cool and comfortable Casimir must feel, sitting still on his horse, at a respectful distance behind the Colonel, than if he were engaged with the others in performing neck-breaking, bewildering movements and evolutions, and

choking all the time with dust and heat and vexation. He thought of Casimir's luck at the time when the elm forest outside the town had been struck by lightning, and was blazing away merrily, so that Sturak and all his comrades had to turn out with axes to cut a clearing and prevent the fire from causing further mischief. And what did Casimir do? Nothing; he just stood aside out of harm's way, superintending and giving directions, like a full-fledged non-commissioned officer, complacently watching the others getting scorched and blistered, not to mention the immediate possibility of their getting their heads broken by the down-crashing trunks. Oh, it was a grand thing to be the Colonel's orderly!

The summer had been quite young when the Cossacks came to Lotz; by the time it was middle-aged Casimir and Jacob seemed to have known each other all their lives. But much earlier in the day the confederacy had been raised to a trio. Satanas was a fine fellow, despite his congenital habit of going on four legs. His skin was smooth as velvet and black as jet, so that the whites of his eyes, shot with thin streaks of red, gleamed out in startling contrast. He was completed by an arching tail, which meant eternity to any presumptuous insect that came within the sweep and purchase of it. Casimir had cropped it by four inches, because otherwise Satanas flicked himself in the afore-mentioned eyes, which did not conduce to his good behavior. For the maintenance of this Casimir was responsible. The horse belonged to the Colonel, and Casimir had his hands full in reminding this same Satanas that even the most high-spirited stallion

has to conform to certain rules and restrictions not observed in his primitive state.

If any man could do that it was Casimir; he was noted as the best and boldest roughrider within the range of the Uralo-Carpathians, and although Satanas came to him with the reputation of having kicked his mother and his brother-foal to death, the mere sound of Casimir's voice soon began to have a most salutary effect on his morals. Occasionally the old, or rather the young Satanas peeped out of him, as in the case of the man who wagered he would ride him with spurs; that man never put on spurs again. Satanas soon saw that Jacob was a friend of his chamberlain, and under the circumstances found it expedient to treat him with a certain amount of consideration; and then he thought that this roundabout way was a waste of time, and determined to like the boy for his own sake.

So the three lived together in very good accord. Every afternoon Casimir took the horse to the river to give him his after-siesta bath; Jacob helped to rub him down, and in reward was allowed to ride him back to stable, with Casimir leading by the bridle. In the meantime the "Minka" song was not forgotten. Sometimes Casimir went about like a man in a trance, or stood looking northwards, his soul and body seemingly nothing but eyes. Jacob knew him in these moods; gently, as though it were merely the wind blowing in snatches of music, he started the song, and gradually let it swell out in full sonorousness, till earth and sky seemed to be singing the glories of Minka. And in the end Casimir always came to himself with a little shiver,

as though he had passed through a tense, soul-racking agony, and felt he had still hope of life.

But once something very unpleasant occurred in connection with the song. It was a sultry night, and the stars flashed as they flash only once in a thousand years, and Jacob had gone with Casimir to pass the night in the great barn that served as sleeping accommodation for the detachment. The others had all dozed off, but Casimir kept tossing and tossing from side to side on his truss; at last he sat up, and with his chin propped up on both hands gazed wearily at the heavens. Jacob watched him furtively for a while, and then, crawling up to him, put his arm round his friend's neck, and whispered:

"Shall I sing it?"

Casimir nodded silently, and Jacob began in a low, crooning tone, which a nurse might use in soothing a fretful child. But it was not so soft that the other sleepers could sleep through it, and one by one they lifted their heads and listened; perhaps it reminded them of their mothers and wives and sisters praying for them in their homes thousands and thousands of miles away. But when Jacob had gone as far as the middle, Sturak's voice came gruffly:

"What ails the Jew-brat? He whines like a wolf-cub that has fed on moonlight instead of mother's milk for a month. Silence, you whimpering cur."

Jacob looked up, and saw Casimir signing to him to go on. That sufficed him; at Casimir's bidding he would have sung in defiance of all other Cossacks in the world.

"Silence, there," shouted Sturak again. "What, you will not? Then listen to this."

His foot shot out, and Jacob flew forward as from a catapult, and the rest of the song tumbled out of him all at once in a heap of gasps and gurgles. Luckily Sturak's foot was unshod, else Jacob would not have been left with any backbone to speak of. Casimir got up very quietly, strode over to where Jacob lay, examined him, and saw there was not much damage done. Relieved on that point, he went back to the barn, and busied himself with Sturak; that is to say, with one hand he clutched him by his shoulder-strap and with the other by the belt, and banged him up and down on the straw pallet, as if he were determined to get a bushel of grain out of the empty ears. Sturak protested, and if he had only once succeeded in getting his teeth firmly set in his assailant's wrist, the latter would have remembered it for many a day to come. But Casimir was lithe as an eel, and when he had done with Sturak as a threshing machine, he threw him down with a decisive thud, and went back to his couch. However, there was not much sleeping done in the barn that night; Casimir kept awake to prevent Sturak from knifing him unawares, and the others had a disquieting notion that Sturak might fasten the barn door from outside and burn them as a sacrifice to his humiliated pride.

The report of the scrimmage got abroad, and Schmeyrel went about with mischievous insinuations concerning Jacob.

"Take care," he told everybody, "that vagabond will plunge us all into ruin; was it not through him

that Sturak was nearly killed? And if it had not been for me and for my begging the Cossack with tears not to visit the sins of the guilty on the innocent, it would have gone hard with us; for he had sworn wherever he met a Jew to run him through the belly with his lance. But, of course, no one thanks me for what I do for the benefit of the congregation."

However, nothing more was heard of the affair, for Sturak thought there was always more to be lost than gained in trying tricks on Casimir. But he carefully made a note of the whole business, and waited an opportunity when he could have his own say with safety. Jacob felt a little stiff for a few days, and then something of such moment happened as to put the recollection of his misadventure clean out of his mind.

The "magnum opus" of Myer Bachya, the famous precentor of Lotz, was at last finished. Twelve months had he been about his setting of the passage "The Lord is King," which is said during the Friday Evening Service, and in all he had made five different and distinct draughts of the composition before he was satisfied with his work. And a wonderful thing it was—so much could be seen even from the imperfect renderings of the initial rehearsals. It started by being chanted right through as a solo by each of the four part voices, and the accompaniment of the other three was varied in every case. This served as an introduction, and then it was gone through with twice in a grand *ensemble* —the first time in "dur" the second in "moll." Then the precentor himself declaimed it as a recitative, and after that came the item *de resistance*—a treble monologue sung by one voice, for which, of course, Jacob

had been cast from the start. The subsequent and diversified movements of "The Lord is King" are too numerous to specify—how numerous, may be gauged by intimation being sent to the wardens of the synagogue that on the eve of its production they had better provide candles three times the length of those used on less conspicuous occasions. Yes, "The Lord is King" was undoubtedly a great work, with fugues and coloratures of the most neck-twisting descriptions, with startling paradoxes of counterpoint, and contra C's for the basses and top C's for the tenors in wasteful profusion. There was not a chorister in Bachya's choir who did not pat himself on the back for having cast in his lot with so distinguished a precentor. Their fame was now assured, for the work would take its triumphant course through all the synagogues of Poland, Slavonia, Kurland, into Hungary and Austria, and they, the original interpreters, would live long in the memories and traditions of their imitators. The solo-singers —all except little Jacob, the greatest of them—gave themselves high airs, and swelled visibly with conceit and a sense of indispensability.

Bachya was very pleased with the progress of the rehearsals, and announced that the *dēbut* of "The Lord is King" was fixed for the eve of the Sabbath of Repentance, which would invest it with greater *éclat*, this being the most momentous of all Sabbaths, because it is the immediate forerunner of the Day of Atonement; and, despite the stress of their own duties, the precentors of Linschitz, Klom, Volesen, and all the neighboring towns had promised to grace the occasion with their presence. And as the decisive day drew near and

things were getting ship-shape, Bachya and his choristers went about with the exhilarating consciousness of having a sensation in store for the world.

Jacob had not seen so much of Casimir lately, but for all that there was no slackening of their friendship. The only difference was that, as time went on, a change came over the Cossack's disposition which Jacob could not fathom. There was a restlessness, an anxious expectancy about him, as though the future were big with tremendous consequences. But when Jacob met him on the morning of the great "The Lord is King" Friday, the look he saw on Casimir's face almost made him cry out in wonder; the man seemed transfigured.

"What has happened?" he asked. "Why, Casimir, you look as if you had been born all over again."

Casimir smiled. "Don't ask questions, little man," he said, "you don't understand these things." And then he sank his voice to a conspirator's whisper. "Do you know what I am going to do? I am going away the whole day; the Colonel is out wolf-hunting, and he won't know. Come with me, I must find some one to give Satanas his afternoon splash; it is getting cold, and there won't be many more for him this season."

Jacob trotted along merrily. "Shall I go down to the river with him?" he asked.

"If you like, why not?" was the answer.

"And may I ride him back?"

Casimir looked serious. "I don't know," he said at last; "it is rather risky without me."

"But he knows me by now," protested Jacob; "he pricks up his ears when he hears me coming, and neighs. I think he likes me as well as you."

"H'm," observed Casimir, cautiously. He knew that Satanas' affection for him was tempered to a certain extent with fear. But there was nothing to be afraid of in little Jacob, and therefore the animal's liking for him was perhaps of a more genuine sort, which made things more hopeful as far as Jacob's request was concerned.

"Well, if you will be very careful," was the decision; "sit very still, and don't let the reins flap, else he might think some one was flogging him."

Jacob promised faithfully to keep a zealous guard over his neck and legs, for the normal condition of which he had a strong partiality. Then they went and found a beetle-browed, heavy-jawed Wallachian, who undertook to act as Casimir's substitute.

The whole forenoon Jacob lounged aimlessly about the streets, the more at a loss for diversion because the afternoon and evening were to be a programme of incidents; besides he was rather impatient to try how much influence he personally possessed over Satanas. He was therefore in good time at the stables, and superintended the removal of Satanas with the air of a proprietor. The river passed by the outskirts of the town, and soon the whole cavalcade of men and horses was sleepily wending its way thither through the sultry afternoon. Jacob passed Schmeyrel walking at Sturak's side.

"Have you been sucking raw eggs?" shouted Schmeyrel.

"What for?" asked Jacob, off his guard.

"To make your voice a bit smoother; it rasps like a grater."

Schmeyrel knew he was telling a lie, and Jacob knew of Schmeyrel's knowledge, and therefore did not trouble to continue the topic, reserving his demonstration for the evening.

In a little while the whole troop were plunging and spuming in the freshening waters, which sucked the seething heat-fever out of their veins. Satanas was behaving in his best style; of course he was aware that Casimir was away, but the presence of Jacob was a guarantee that things were as they should be. So when, after the ablutions, Jacob mounted him, it was only what he expected.

The others were cantering on in front; Satanas was right behind, for Jacob was mindful of Casimir's precept to use him gently; the Wallachian walked stolidly by his side, one hand on the bridle. Gradually one of the other mounts fell back, and Jacob saw it was Sturak with Schmeyrel on the saddle in front of him. Schmeyrel had cut himself a withe from the bank, and was swishing it in the air. The two horses trotted side by side with a fair distance between them. Then Sturak edged up closer, keeping somewhat in the rear, so that Jacob hardly noticed that they were only an arm's length or so apart.

Sturak was eying Satanas with sidelong glances, and somehow the beast gave him a suggestion of which he had long been in search. If Schmeyrel should chance to whip him ever so lightly with his withe, there would probably be consequences not redounding to Casimir's credit in his capacity of Colonel's orderly; it would also incidentally wipe off the little score still due to him from the barn episode.

"Strike him," he whispered in Schmeyrel's ear.

Schmeyrel did not at once catch the drift of the bidding. Then it came home to him that, if he sent Satanas tearing away with his rider, there would, in all likelihood, not be sufficient of the rider left to sing the treble solo in "The Lord is King" that evening. And of course there would be requisition of himself as understudy. With a deft, insidious movement he lashed Satanas across the haunches. Satanas walked on unconcernedly; he felt the sting, but then he thought there must be a mistake somewhere; no one would take such a liberty with him.

Sturak could not make it out. "Strike harder," he whispered again, and Schmeyrel struck harder.

This time Satanas was certain, and did not stay to see if the arm of the Wallachian was still in its socket, or if he had pulled it out by the roots. With a shrill whistle of anger he levelled his neck, and leapt forward, as if there were myriads of hornets and gadflies behind him. Jacob had just time to throw himself flat, and clutch as much of the coal-black mane as his convulsive little hands could hold. And then he lay quite still, sucking himself on to the maddened brute with all the pores of his body. So he flew on, passing the straggling groups ahead one by one. In wonder and terror they stared after the hapless rider, but no one stirred a finger; it would be madness to get in the way of that stampeding avalanche of hoof and tail and foam. Jacob felt nothing, only the hissing, whizzing noise in his ears, and the black dancing spots that kept circling before his eyes. His limbs were numbed with a narcotic torpor, and he breathed only when the vice across

his chest grew so tight that it seemed to grip his life by the very core. Whither was he being carried away? Perhaps to his father in heaven; well, then, he hoped he would get there soon, for he was quite tired of the deserts and deserts of nothingness he had already traversed. At one place he heard a loud shriek which he knew was his mother's, and from that he gathered he must be somewhere near the synagogue, for she had gone betimes to get a good seat, from which to feast her eyes and ears on the one lamb that made all her flock.

For all we know this might have been the last of Satanas and Jacob. But that would be forgetting the existence of Casimir and the special Providence that watched over "The Lord is King" cantata. Casimir had done his day's business, and was walking home very pleased with himself and everybody else. Just as he was turning the cross-road, he caught the sound of trampling. "A runaway horse," he said to himself; he ought to have known, for runaway horses were a specialty of his. On a nearer view he found the horse was black, was running as if it had split its four legs into eight, and consequently was Satanas; there was a motionless little figure clinging to his neck, with its yellow curls fluttering in the wind like a flag, which presumably was Jacob: the situation was quite clear.

Casimir knew better than to fling his arms about like a windmill and halloo; Satanas was going quite fast enough without being given reasonable motive for an extra spurt. So he waited till they were abreast, and then proceeded to test how far he could stretch his legs without actually dislocating them. Man and beast ran

on side by side till they had come to a spread of green turf, and then Casimir saw his chance. Bending forward he just whispered one word, "Satanas!" and Satanas stood still as if his feet had suddenly grown into the earth. But Casimir ran full two yards forward, opened his arms, and dexterously caught the limp, huddled form, which he knew would come whirling through the air with a semicircular sweep.

Five minutes afterwards Jacob was saying, "Is that you, Casimir?"

"Yes, little man"—there was half a sob in the answer.

"Casimir!"

"What, Jacob?"

"Tell me the truth—am I alive?"

Casimir would have laughed, but he lacked the requisite breath.

"Yes, Jacob, you are alive," he said soberly.

"Then come and let me tell my mother so."

He suddenly grasped what had been the nagging thought at the back of his brain that had kept him from dying.

"The Lord is King" was a prodigious success—there were no two opinions about it. Casimir, who had been standing open-mouthed all through, thought that Jacob had sung more gloriously than he had ever sung the "Minka" song; but perhaps Jacob's rendering had lost some of its merit in consequence of certain events.

The following Sunday Jacob met Casimir coming out of church, but he was not alone; there was a young woman with him, by her dress evidently a Livonian.

Jacob turned tail to run, but Casimir caught him gently by the arm, and said smilingly:

"Jacob, this is Minka; was she not worth while singing of?"

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